

KANSAS #1 COLLEGE BASKETBALL PREVIEW

SPORT

Warrior or Wimp?

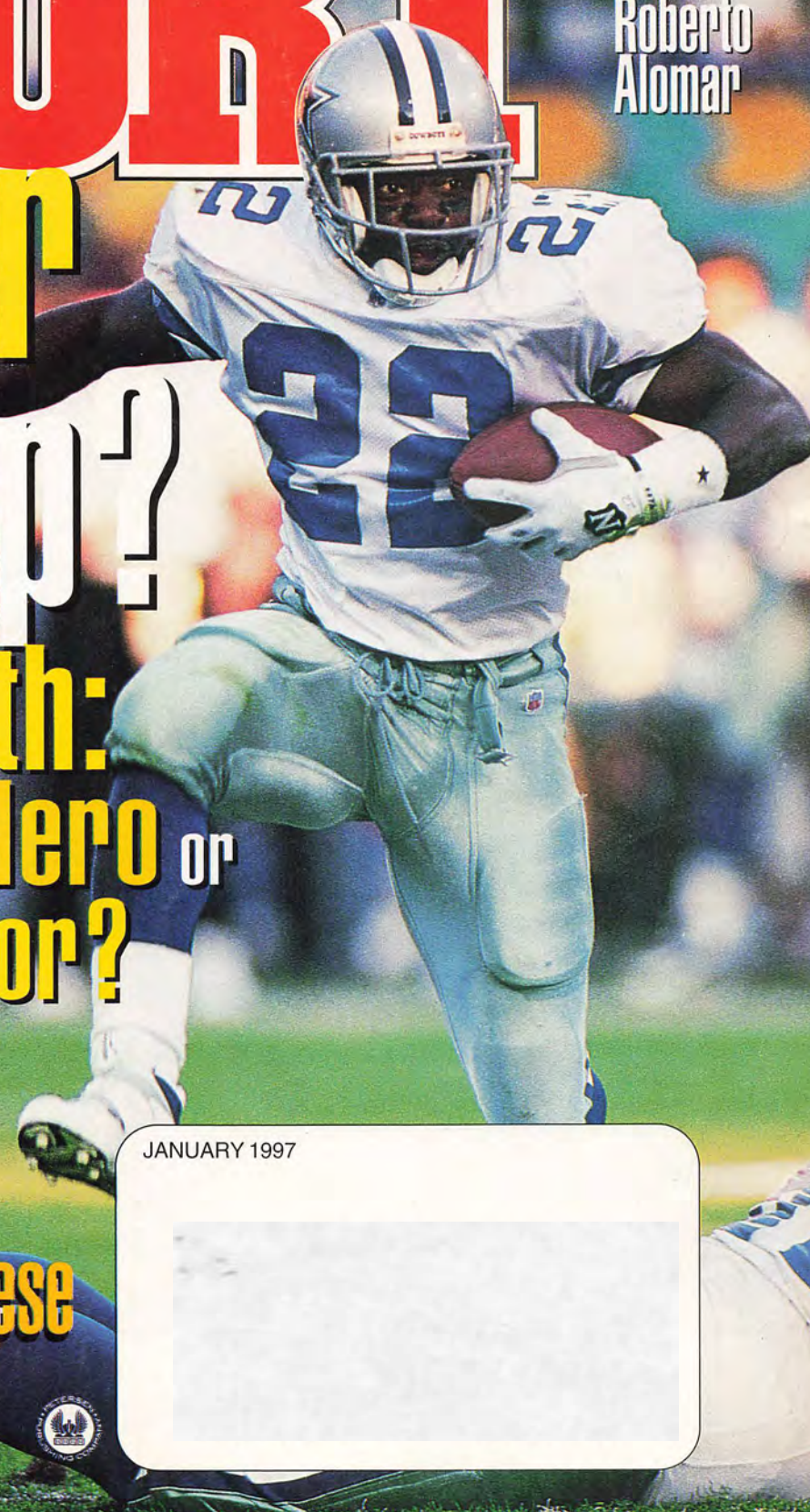
**Exclusive
Interview:**
**Roberto
Alomar**

Emmitt Smith:

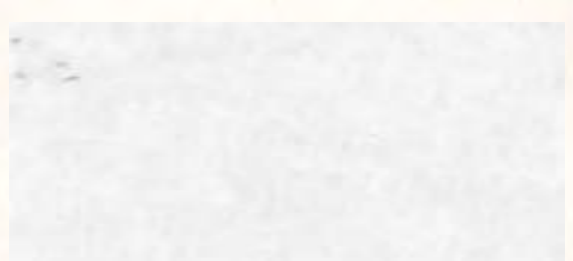
Injury-Conquering **Hero** or
'Emmy'-Winning **Actor?**


PACKER Mania:

Cheerin' for the **Cheese**



JANUARY 1997



A photograph of three men dressed as cowboys, standing in a barn. They are wearing cowboy hats, denim jackets, and chaps. The man on the left is holding a coiled lasso. The man in the middle is partially obscured. The man on the right is looking off to the side. The background is a wooden barn wall with warm, orange-toned lighting.

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COVER STORY

26 EMMITT SMITH

The Cowboys running back is a proven winner, but a warrior? His frequent medical scares on national TV beg the question: Is he an injury-conquering hero or an "Emmy"-winning actor?



COVER: EMMITT SMITH BY PAUL JASIENSKI

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SPORT

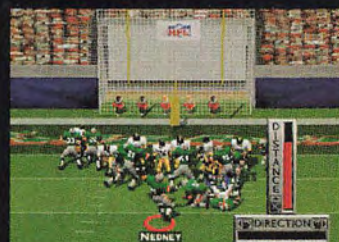
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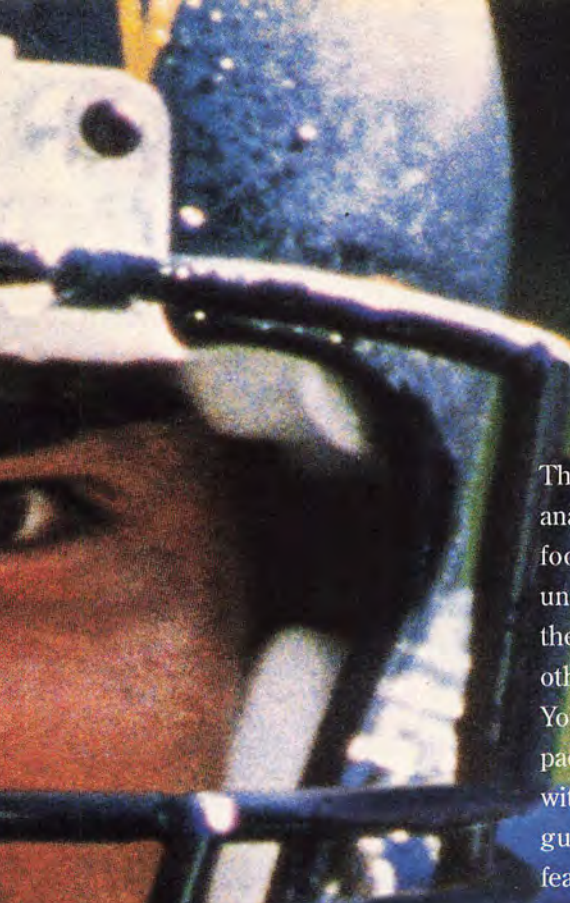
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TODD ROSENBERG/ALL SPORTS

SOLOMON LUTHELOW/JUMPER

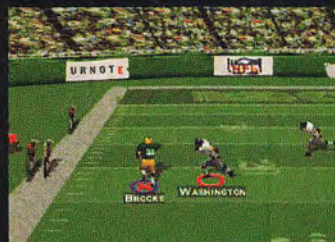


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How & Fresno in Hollywood

Hollywood execs are screaming, "You'll never work in this city again" to Shawn Kemp after the NBA's newest superstar stiffed Phoenix's Salgado Productions Ltd. last August.

Apparently, the man-child acted like the latter when he ignored his contractual agreement to appear in the upcoming movie *3 on 3*.

"You know how people say, 'Remember the Alamo'? I'm saying, 'Remember Kim Basinger,'" says Tito Salgado of the actress who reneged on a verbal contract.

Movie officials say Kemp snubbed them twice—first by not showing up on his designated film day, then by demanding more money for his appearance.

"I guess in basketball, if you're not happy with your contract you just don't show up," says Salgado, who is suing Kemp for breach of contract. "The team's not going to sue you because they need you. But if you do stuff like that in the real world, you're asking for trouble."

Tom Cruise, who banked \$200 million domestically for *Mission: Impossible*, could become the first sports agent to rake in nine-figures without having Shaquille O'Neal or Alonzo Mourning as a client—that is, if *Jerry Maguire*, the Tri-Star film out Dec. 14, dominates this month's movie box office the way most Cruise vehicles do. "This movie could have the best feel for pro sports that's been out in a while," says NFL superagent Leigh Steinberg.

Barry Bonds threatened to sue the makers of *The Fan* because he thinks they based Wesley Snipes' character on him. That's funny, I don't remember Snipes' character refusing alimony payments, stiffing reporters or asking to be traded.

EYE ON FOOTBALL

As the NFL season winds down, competition in the broadcast booth will rival that of the gridiron. The league's current TV contract expires at the end of the 1997 season, and many expect talks on the new deal to begin well prior. CBS, which was outbid by Fox for weekly NFC games and a share of post-season action three years ago, will make a play to re-enter the NFL television fold.

Fox's inventive methods and lively broadcasts with CBS refugees Pat Summerall and John Madden have made many fans all but forget that the Eye once brought into living rooms weekly NFC games and a share of the postseason. Since being outbid by Fox—which pays \$395 million per year (not including, of course, the salaries of Summerall and Madden)—for a portion of the package, CBS' overall fortunes have taken a turn for the worse; sans football, the Eye has been a cellar-dweller in the three major networks' ratings race.

If CBS again is to tackle football, the price will be steep. A total of



five broadcast and cable companies are involved in the current deal—Fox and NBC (weekend games), ABC ("Monday Night Football"), and cable outlets TNT and ESPN (Sunday and Thursday night games)—so space may be tight. If CBS is to recapture a spot, it will likely not be at the level it enjoyed four years ago, but rather with the Sunday night package currently shared by the two cable networks.

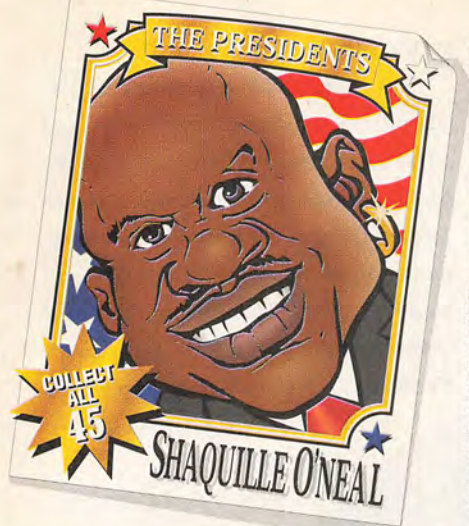
With CBS' efforts to rediscover past football glory, and with wealthy partners in the other networks also committed to spending money for NFL rights, the deal will certainly surpass the four-year, \$4.4 billion current one.

Although the eventual negotiations for the NFL's television rights will involve men in suits and be held in conference rooms where no television crews are present, the most noticeable and lasting effect will be felt on the field. —Paul M. Johnson

COLLEGE SPOTLIGHT

WHO: Robyn Ah Mow, 5-8 senior setter from Hawaii. **WHAT:** Rainbow Wahines compete in 48-team NCAA Women's Volleyball Championships. **WHEN AND WHERE:** Dec. 4-21 in Cleveland. **Hawaii head coach Dave Shoji on Ah Mow's request not to be interviewed:** "She's just a very private person. It's nothing against the media. She's just shy." **Shoji on Ah Mow:** "We've had some great setters in the history of the program, a bunch of first-team All-Americans, but Robyn's got to be right there at the top. She has great quickness, the softest delivery, and delivers the ball where it's very hittable. She has an overall game, with defense and blocking skills. Her worth to the team is delivering the ball to the right hitter at the right time." **Shoji on losing to Michigan State at home in the '95 NCAA Regionals:** "It was devastating. We hadn't lost a match all year and were ahead 2-0 in front of our home crowd. It was traumatic. Everybody came in to practice in the spring and the only thing on their minds was to get to the Final Four in '96." —PJ





SAVE THOSE CARDS

Just when the sagging collectibles industry needed a boost came word that a vice-presidential nomination instantly doubled the value of Jack Kemp's rookie card, and that the card would have cracked four-figures had he cracked the White House. This second-career syndrome was wonderful news for people who had run out of excuses for collecting trading cards. But you've got to be prepared for the sports superstars' next moves:

Charles Barkley: U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Nicaragua, Korea or wherever only the most delicate tact will do. Will be known as The Round Mound Of Shut-Up-And-Listen.

Dennis Rodman: A woman.

Shaquille O'Neal: President. Changes the look of the White House forever, of course, as the first president who is really tall.

Andy Van Slyke: First man to land on Jupiter. For him, it'll be a homecoming.

Troy Aikman: Secretary of State. Brilliant at mediating peace on the world stage. Currently tutoring noted teamwork antagonists Jerry Jones and Barry Switzer.

Mike Piazza: Secretary General of United Nations. Cut teeth catching Dodgers staff of Korean, Japanese, Mexican, Dominican, Australian and Tasmanian pitchers.

Jim Kelly: Not only president of the Hair Club For Men, but also a client.

Thurman Thomas: Inventor of a line of ergonomic chairs, the Helmet Hind-Rest.

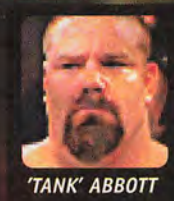
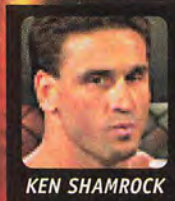
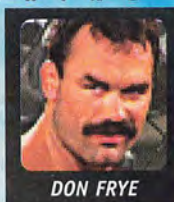
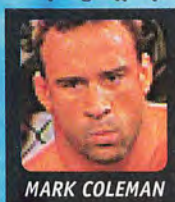
Lawrence Phillips: TV star. Regular on "America's Most Wanted." —Tom Singer

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seeing is believing

**CHARLES
BARKLEY**
NEXT MONTH IN
SPORT

JERRY JONES EARNS GENIUS LABEL

For continual team success in the NFL, an understanding of the dynamics of the salary cap is quickly becoming as important as scouting and perhaps even coaching. Cowboys owner Jerry Jones knows this; an experienced capologist, Jones is shrewdly positioning himself and his Cowboys for a long-term grip on the dynasty label.

By most estimates, the amount of money generated by the next NFL television deal will increase dramatically from the four-year, \$4.4 billion pact now in place. (Oakland Raiders owner Al Davis has said it will double.)

For the league, which recently extended the current labor structure to the year 2000, more television money means an increased

salary cap. For each team, that means more money to spend and, for each player, more to earn.

So how will Jones be able to pay Troy Aikman, Emmitt Smith, Michael Irvin and Deion Sanders when the going rate on even a marginal free agent is in the

on the rest of the puzzle.

Jones wasn't the first to do this. Cleveland Indians general manager John Hart began the trend in baseball by signing young and, in some cases, unproven players to multi-year contracts. After players such as Jim Thome, Manny Ramirez and Charles Nagy had breakthrough seasons, Hart didn't have to worry about losing them to free agency.

The salary-cap increase will be implemented when a new television deal replaces the existing one, which won't expire until after the 1997 season. Talks, however, will likely begin earlier than usual to accommodate all suitors (including CBS, attempting to re-enter the football market it was bid out of three years ago) in a congested field. There are even talks of the networks (NBC, Fox and/or CBS) having their own Thursday night, Saturday night and Sunday night games to go along with ABC's "Monday Night Football."

—Paul M. Johnson



millions? Easy. Jones has each player locked into salaries that, if the TV deal is as large as expected, will be market value in a couple years. He'll be getting relative bargains in his superstars and will be able to spend the remaining money

—AL BELLO/ALL SPORT



COURTESY OF WARNER BROTHERS

IN & OUT

- IN:** Cheeseheads
- OUT:** Dawg Pound
- IN:** Jump in the stands
- OUT:** The spike
- IN:** West Coast Offense
- OUT:** Run-'n'-Shoot
- IN:** Jerome Bettis
- OUT:** Lawrence Phillips
- IN:** Nashville
- OUT:** Houston
- IN:** Sugar Bowl
- OUT:** Big 12, WAC and SEC championship games
- IN:** TuneTeam (pictured)
- OUT:** Dream Team III

The cheerful 19-year-old surfer/model has just experienced a mental wipeout, trying to remember where she will be for her next *Elle* photo shoot.

"Bahamas—no, Barbados," says Jones, eating a fruit salad poolside at California's Waterfront Hilton in Huntington Beach for this chat.

"Isn't that funny? OK, it is the Bahamas. See, I get those mixed up because I just went to a shoot in Barbados, but I called it Bahamas while I was there, and now I'm going to the Bahamas and I'm calling it Barbados. It's like, I don't know where I'm going."

There are plenty in the business who say they know exactly where she's going: straight to the top of her newfound profession.

Jones has enjoyed a wave of success, with appearances in *Elle*, *Made-moiselle*, *Top Model* and, most recently, on the November '96 cover of *Glamour*.

"The sky's the limit for Malia Jones," says John English, Jones' manager. "She could do for surfing what Gabrielle Reece did for women's beach volleyball."

Jones has not received her own MTV show or Nike sportswear sponsorship a la Reece, but give her time—she's only been at this surfer/model thing for 18 months now. Still, she's appeared on "Late Night with Conan O'Brien," been slated to host her own show this spring on ESPN ("Hawaiian Sports Adventure"), started a line of surfwear called Pink M.A.F.I.A., and even considered a movie script based on a

group of friends who embark on a surf trip around the world. "Surfing and traveling to the places sounds cool, so we'll see," says Jones.

The 5-6, bikini-clad beauty from the North Shore of Oahu knows she's in foreign waters now as the first women's surfer to receive mass media coverage. It's been a

man's sport for so long with stars such as Kelly Slater, Rob Machado and Kalani Robb (Malia's boyfriend) commanding the spotlight and sponsorship dollars.

"Surfing is a good, clean sport for girls," says Jones. "When I started surfing, there was nobody out there, no girls to look up to. Now every single time I go in the water, there's a girl out there. So I'm stoked. I just hope it goes further." —Darryl Howerton

TALK OF THE TOWN MALIA JONES



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ODE	RTE		
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BRETT FAVRE Q&A

NEXT MONTH IN
SPORT

hangtime

ROBERTO

ALOMAR

"I know what I did was wrong, but there are two sides to the story"

By Barry M. Bloom

Roberto Alomar is sitting in a small room deep within the bowels of red-brick Camden Yards, pouring his heart out. It is a small meeting room just adjacent to the Baltimore Orioles clubhouse. On one side of a closed partition is a coach studying video. On the other side is just a desk, two chairs, Alomar and me. This exclusive interview comes near the end of the American League Championship Series and less than a month after "the incident."

For the first time, Alomar speaks at length about why he spat at home plate umpire John Hirschbeck after the second baseman was ejected from a key regular-season game in Toronto last Sept. 27.

Asking to keep the actual profane word off the record, Alomar says Hirschbeck called him a part of the rear anatomy that is covered by his baseball pants. Later, Alomar says, Hirschbeck continued the verbal assault by using the term "motherf---er."

"He said something strong, but I should have never done what I did," says Alomar, his words full of remorse, his eyes nearly coming to tears. "I'm not going to sit here and say what I did was right. It wasn't right. But it was emotional and in the heat of the moment. I know what I did was wrong, but there are two sides to the story. It's something that I



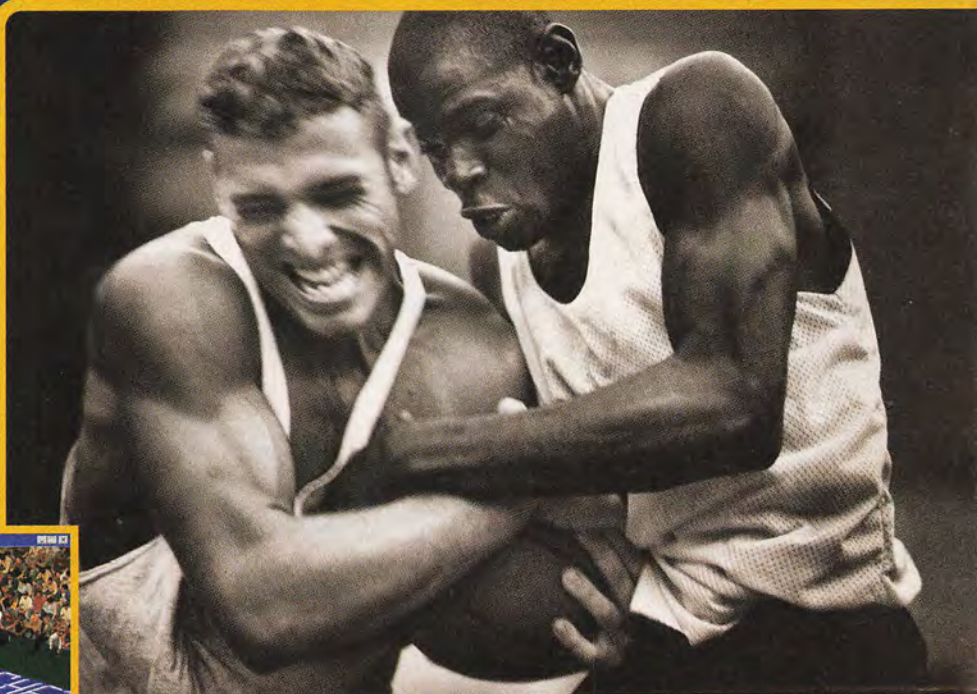
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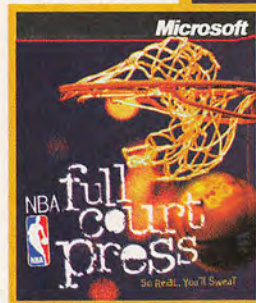


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"I apologized to him, to his family, to the game of baseball and to the fans. But people who know me, who know my family, realize I'm not a bad person."

think has been blown out of proportion."

On the field after the ejection, Alomar heatedly pled his case with Baltimore Orioles manager Davey Johnson. Alomar says Johnson asked Hirschbeck why he ejected one of his best players from such a crucial game—with the Orioles still vying for a wild-card spot on the last Friday of the regular season.

Recalls Alomar: "[Hirschbeck] said, 'I don't give a f---k about him.' After that, he called me a name and that's when I went ballistic. I think we both were wrong. I think what he did was wrong. It was a real insult because I never have problems with umpires like that, calling me those kinds of names. The same way I owe him respect, he owes me respect."

The word going around baseball was that Hirschbeck called Alomar a "fag."

"I don't know if he called me that," Alomar says. "He might have called it, but I didn't hear it. I cannot say yes or no. I say no because I didn't hear it. I only heard what I told you and that's it. And my manager was there, so he heard it too. It's not like I'm lying or something like that. I don't have to lie."

While not coming out and defining the actual profanity Hirschbeck used, Johnson corroborates that there was more to the incident than meets the lips.

"I'm not discussing that until the appropriate time," Johnson says. "I know what all went on and I know what set him off."

The incident began when Hirschbeck called Alomar out on strikes. From television replays, the offending pitch clearly appeared outside. Alomar says he immediately questioned the call.

Alomar says Hirschbeck told him the pitch was so close, "You better swing at that pitch." "So I said the pitch was outside," says Alomar. "As I walked away, he said, 'If you say something else, you're out of the game.'"

Back in the Orioles' dugout, Alomar was so adamant, he kept up the patter, telling Hirschbeck: "Pay attention to the game. Let's go. Let's play the game."

"And he threw me out," Alomar says. "I didn't think he could hear me from where he was. I don't think I said anything bad. I came running back on the field to ask him why he threw me out of the game."

The rest of the incident is splattered all over baseball history. In the club-



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house after the game, Alomar told reporters that Hirschbeck's personality had changed in the three years since the death of the umpire's young son from a rare brain disease. The comments seemed to be ill-placed at best, insensitive at worst. Alomar, whose English is clear but fractured, disputes the validity of those ill-timed remarks.

"It was twisted," he says. "I didn't say anything bad. It's like you asking me, 'Do you think he has changed?' A lot of people think he has changed. I said: 'Yeah, a little since the death of his son. But I don't blame him for that because the death of any family member, especially a son, is the worst thing that can happen in your life.' That's what I said. It came out completely different. I respect everybody's family. I didn't mean anything bad about him or his family."

Hirschbeck did not admit that he said anything profane to Alomar. Calls to umpires union chief Richie Phillips were not returned before this story was published. Asked why Hirschbeck has refused to acknowledge his culpability in the incident, Alomar says: "I don't know if he wants to say it to the public. I just want to put it behind me. I want to look forward. I don't think one bad thing should turn your life upside down. People have to realize that. I don't have a bad record. This is the only bad thing I have done in my nine years in professional baseball. I did what I had to do as a man. I didn't hide from the media. I didn't hide from nobody. It was a challenge for me."

Alomar was not prepared for the ensuing fire storm. In the week after the incident, the story took on a larger-than-life proportion. There was the controversy about what Alomar actually did. But of equal importance was major-league baseball's obvious inability to deal with the issue. The five-day suspension of Alomar, waived until the start of next season, infuriated the umpires union and gave the incident incredible legs.

Baseball's reluctance to suspend Alomar on the eve of the playoffs did as much to fuel the outrage over the incident as the incident itself. In the immediate aftermath, Alomar was certainly distressed about what he had done.

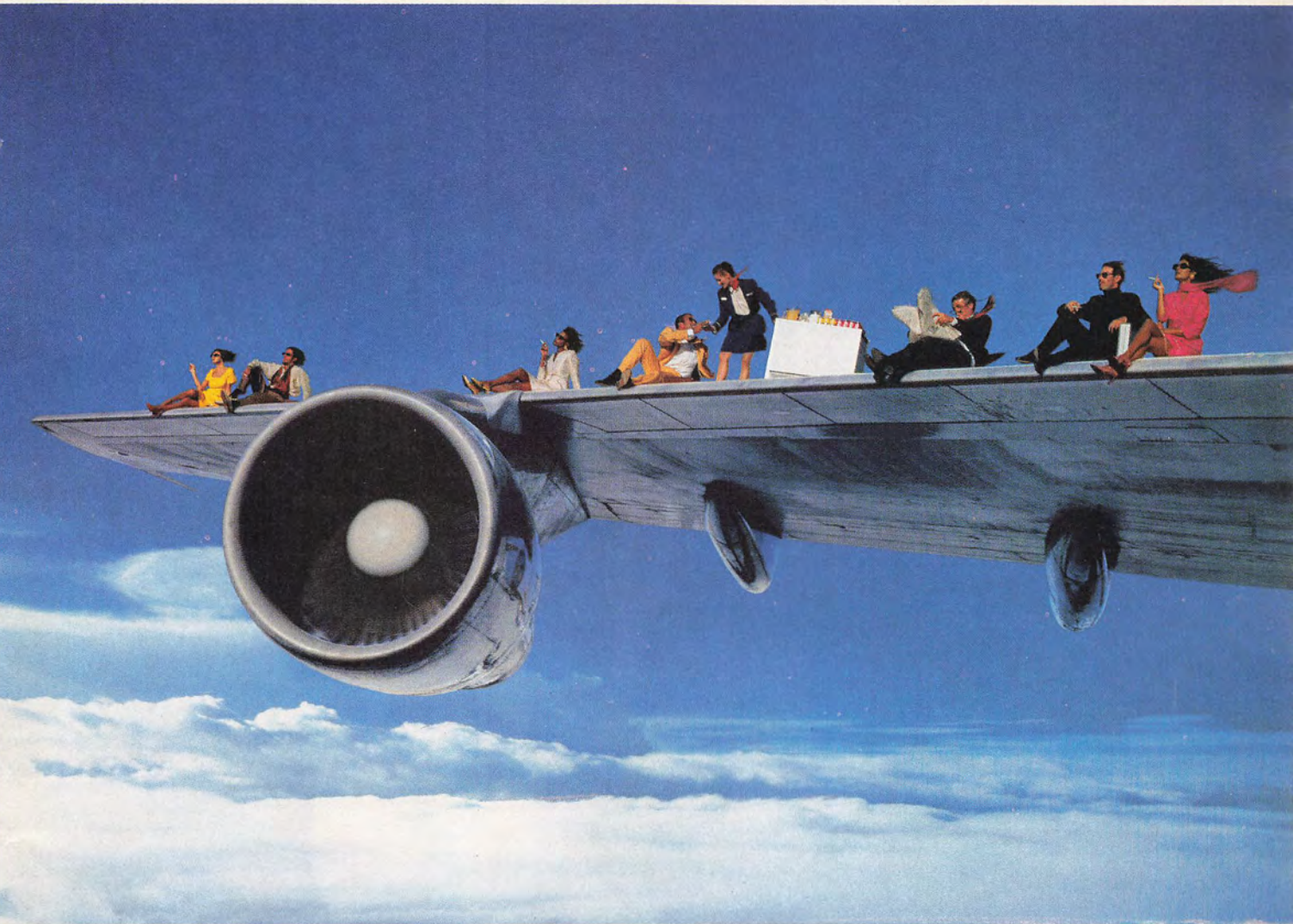
"You feel kind of bad," Alomar says. "Maybe people are thinking you are a bad person. I think if I didn't have a name, if I had been just some normal guy, it wouldn't have been such a big deal."

"I don't want anybody, especially

"I don't have a bad record. This is the only bad thing I have done in my nine years in professional baseball."



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hangtime

the kids, doing what I did. It's not right. I want to apologize to all the baseball fans because it's something you should not do."

But by the time the incident had become a national issue, tackled by Jack Kemp and Al Gore in the vice presidential debate, Alomar began to take exception to the rough treatment.

"A week after the incident, they were still talking about suspending me," Alomar says. "Everywhere I went, I'm watching TV, people are talking about spitting. It was all over the place. When I went to New York, the front page of the paper called me, 'The Most Wanted,' like I'm a criminal or something. Fans are calling me names.

"I talked to my dad [former big-leaguer Sandy Alomar Sr.]. He says always look at what is in front of you. Don't look to the side. You don't play baseball to the side. You play baseball right here, on the diamond. Just focus on whatever is happening on the diamond."

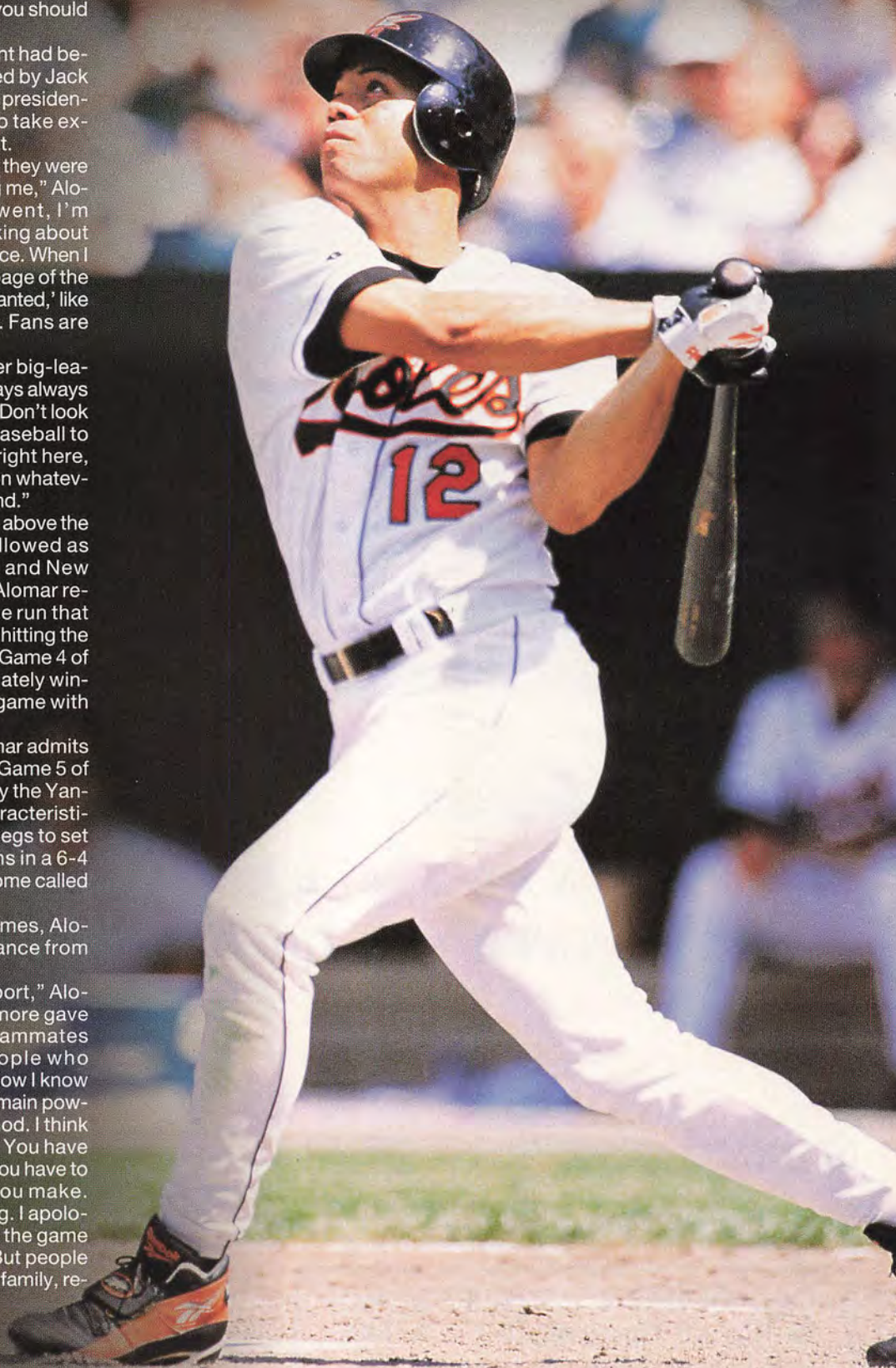
That is how Alomar stayed above the tumult in the weeks that followed as fans in Toronto, Cleveland and New York verbally assailed him. Alomar responded by hitting the home run that clinched the wild-card berth, hitting the single that tied the Indians in Game 4 of the division series, and ultimately winning that series later in that game with another home run.

At times off the field, Alomar admits he felt lost and confused. In Game 5 of the ALCS, a ground ball hit by the Yankees' Bernie Williams uncharacteristically shot through Alomar's legs to set up five crucial unearned runs in a 6-4 loss that ended the series. Some called that poetic justice.

But during the worst of times, Alomar says he gained sustenance from his friends and family.

"My family gave me support," Alomar says. "The fans in Baltimore gave me support. A few of my teammates gave me support. The people who know me gave me support. Now I know who my true friends are. The main power came from my mom and God. I think everybody makes mistakes. You have to move on in life. As a man, you have to confront all the mistakes you make. And I think I did the right thing. I apologized to him, to his family, to the game of baseball and to the fans. But people who know me, who know my family, realize I'm not a bad person." ★

Asking to keep the actual profane word off the record, Alomar says Hirschbeck called him a part of the rear anatomy that is covered by his baseball pants.



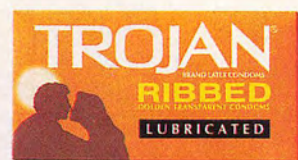
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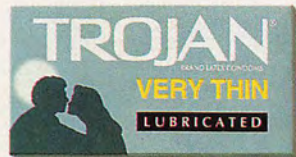
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OUR BASIC CONCEPT.



All you need to know about the reasons the NBA fizzles while major-league baseball falters can be gathered from the handling of the two leagues' respective outlaws, Dennis Rodman, basketball's bawdy sensualist, and Albert Belle, baseball's angry young outfielder.

The two have little in common. Belle is ill-natured, has a Vesuvian temper; he's our Ty Cobb. Rodman is a concoction, our Gorgeous George. Belle hates the press; he has the people skills of a metal detector.

RICH KANE/SPORTS CHROME

Rodman craves the press; they drive up his Q rating. They also let him undress.

Neither spares women. Belle spat profanities at Hannah Storm for being in his dugout. Rodman said

said. This guy has a McDonald's endorsement.

Such a scream, that Rodman. There's one angle on it, the one nurtured by the NBA, in cahoots with an enabling media and en-

guest-starring on "3rd Rock from the Sun," getting larger and larger. Meanwhile, Belle caught hell weekly. Usually, he had it coming. He threw a ball at a photographer, confessed to chasing down Halloween loiterers who egged his house, cheap-shot a second baseman on a tag play. He still won't run out ground balls.

Baseball, in which bad boys are as unwelcome as left-handed shortstops, has made Belle out to be some undomesticated stray. Belle once fired a ball at a fan. So did John McEnroe. McEnroe got a pain reliever endorsement out of it, a send-up of his temper. Belle? He got a fine. Worse, he became the subject of one of those anesthetizing blight-on-the-game sermons from Bob Costas.

Now, if Belle had the NBA marketers behind him, you'd see him in commercials breaking stuff over his knee, glowering, eating his crust first—makin' it work for him.

Which is worse? My vote goes to Rodman, though Belle is about as twisted. He'll turn on you like a 3-1 fastball; the guy just doesn't like people, that's all. Hey, who does? At least he's straight about it, which makes him far more interesting than Rodman, who's got the hair, the angle: the Freak, the Shock Jock. Whatever.

And Belle won us over with one of the all-time great machismo moments. When charged with corking his bat after a long home run, he glared viciously at the implugging dugout, went into a pose-down, and, pointing at his arched biceps, hollered, baby, got your \$!#! cork right here. God, that was good.

So Albert, here's to you. You're the one as bad as you wanna be. The other guy is as bad as his ghostwriter makes him out to be. How about an interview? Geez, whoa, all right, easy...just thought I'd ask.

Dennis, anyone? ★

Get Smart

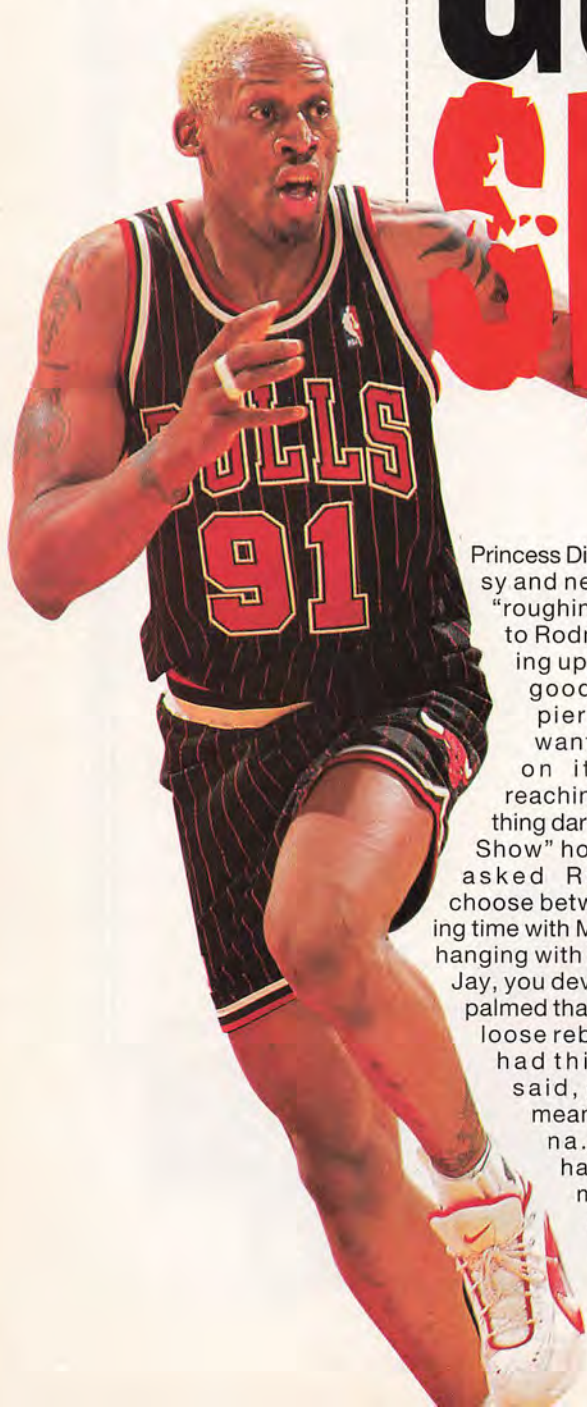
...about Dennis Rodman vs. Albert Belle

By Jeff Weinstock

Princess Diana was prissy and needed some "roughing up." Now, to Rodman, roughing up can mean a good epidermal piercing. If you want to call him on it, he was reaching for something darker. "Tonight Show" host Jay Leno asked Rodman to choose between spending time with Madonna and hanging with Princess Di. Jay, you devil—Rodman palmed that setup like a loose rebound. "I've had this one," he said, gesturing, meaning Madonna. "I haven't had this one," meaning Diana. Leno giggled with laughter. Had, he

couraging corporate sponsors. Sunny-side-up NBA boss David Stern explains that every family has room for an eccentric. He's Our Dennis, gonging foreheads with that runty referee, inciting opponents, lounging in his socks on the sidelines. Priceless. The league hyena laughs at him all the way to the bank, harvesting all the surplus dough and p.r. that Dennis' dementia can bear.

Rodman spent the summer hosting his own show for MTV, donning a bridal gown to a book-signing,



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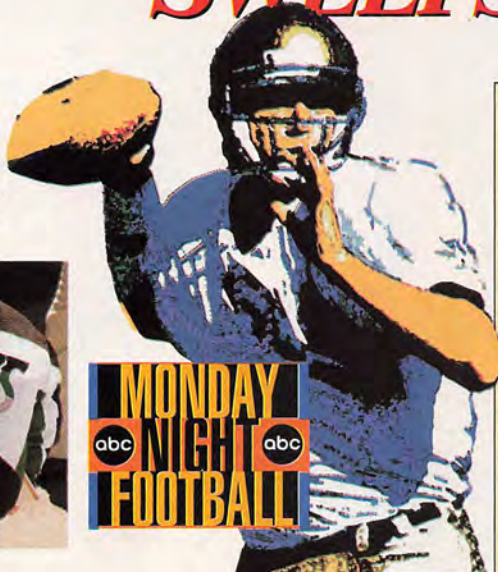


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Not responsible for lost, misdirected, damaged, postage-due, illegible, late mail, printing or other errors. 3) Selected entrants will be selected in a random drawing conducted on or about January 4, 1997, from among all eligible entries received, under the supervision of an independent certified public accountant, whose decisions shall be final on all matters concerning the sweepstakes drawing. Odds of winning are determined by the total number of eligible entries received. Limit one prize per family or household. All prizes will be awarded. Entries become the property of Petersen Publishing Company and will not be returned. Each entrant consents to the transfer of all information contained on his/her entry form(s) to other companies. Entry constitutes permission to use winner's name and likeness for promotional purposes without added compensation except where prohibited. 4) Selected entrants will be notified by mail. Selected entrants must follow the directions contained in any required Affidavit of Eligibility/Release of Liability/Prize Acceptance Form or any correspondence attached therewith and return all forms, correctly filled out within seven (7) days of the date on the correspondence. Traveling companions of the first prize winner will also be required to sign a release. Non compliance within this time period will result in disqualification and an alternate will be selected. Canadian residents will be required to correctly answer a skilled testing question, before a prize can be awarded. In the event the skill testing question is incorrectly answered, the prize will not be awarded. 5) The prizes are as follows: Grand Prize (there is one grand prize)-A 1997 Ford Ranger SuperCab XLT 4x4 with PEP 853A. Approximate MSRP of Grand Prize is \$20,010.00. 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BUILT **FUN** TOUGH 

Arvydas Sabonis

"Only the NBA remains."

With these words, Arvydas Sabonis in May of 1995 brought to a close a portentous 11-year professional career in Europe and loaded his weighty legend onto a plane headed for Portland, Ore., USA, and into the waiting arms of his longtime suitors, the Trail Blazers.

Having selected Sabonis with the 24th pick of a draft held nearly a decade earlier, the team had been wondering if the 7-3, 290-pound Lithuanian would ever wear a Blazers jersey. He was, at the point, 30 years old, a chronic sufferer of knee and back pain and veteran of a twice-ruptured Achilles tendon. The Blazers were fortunate: In 73 regular-season games, more than double the number he had played in any Spanish League season during the previous six years, Sabonis hauled his immense frame onto NBA hardwoods and introduced a brand of play that was, for a big man, nearly indescribable.

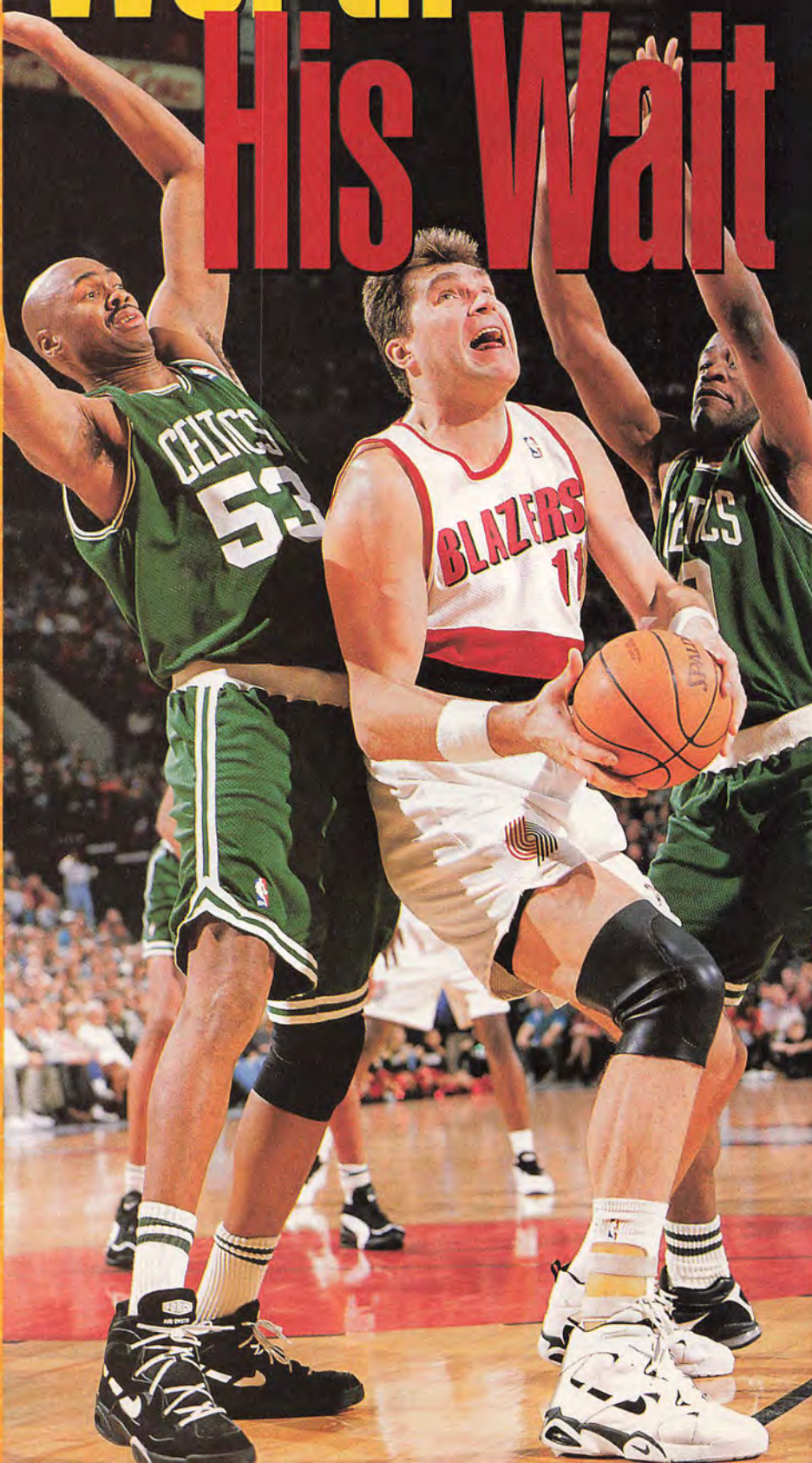
He used his size in the post to set up indefensible, feathery-touch hooks, sneaked out to the perimeter to drop threes and, living up to reputation, passed the ball with accuracy and inimitable flash. For the year, he shot 55 percent from the field, averaged 14.5 points and eight rebounds in under 24 minutes a game, and led the Blazers to an 18-4 record down the stretch when coach P.J. Carlesimo finally inserted him into the starting lineup.

The initial U.S. intrigue began in 1981 while, as a 17-year-old touring with the Soviet national team, Sabonis scored 25 points, grabbed eight rebounds and blocked three shots in a win over Bobby Knight's Indiana Hoosiers. Five years later, the Atlanta Hawks picked Sabonis in the 1985 draft, but were not granted his rights because the league deemed him too young.

Portland the next year used its first-round pick to secure the player the organization felt would be the final piece to the championship puzzle, but Sabonis was not yet free to leave the USSR and, when in 1989 he finally was, chose the Spanish League over the Blazers. Six seasons and three championships later, only the NBA remained.

—Paul M. Johnson

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LOUIS DELUCA

Predictably, Emmitt was down. Especially on "Monday Night Football," Emmitt Smith almost always writhes with a possible knee or hamstring injury after at least one whistle.

Almost always he rises to run through the apparent pain—and through frustrated tacklers. But this looked different. Near the end of the Dallas Cowboys' 22-6 season-opening Monday night loss in Chicago, Emmitt landed on his head and stayed down for 10 minutes.

Could it be a career-ending spinal injury for one of the world's most popular athletes? Emmitt's best-in-sports smile had become a slit of tight-lipped agony. America held its breath.

Cowboys doctors called for a cart that carried Emmitt up the Soldier Field tunnel to an ambulance. He was rushed to the hospital for tests—which were

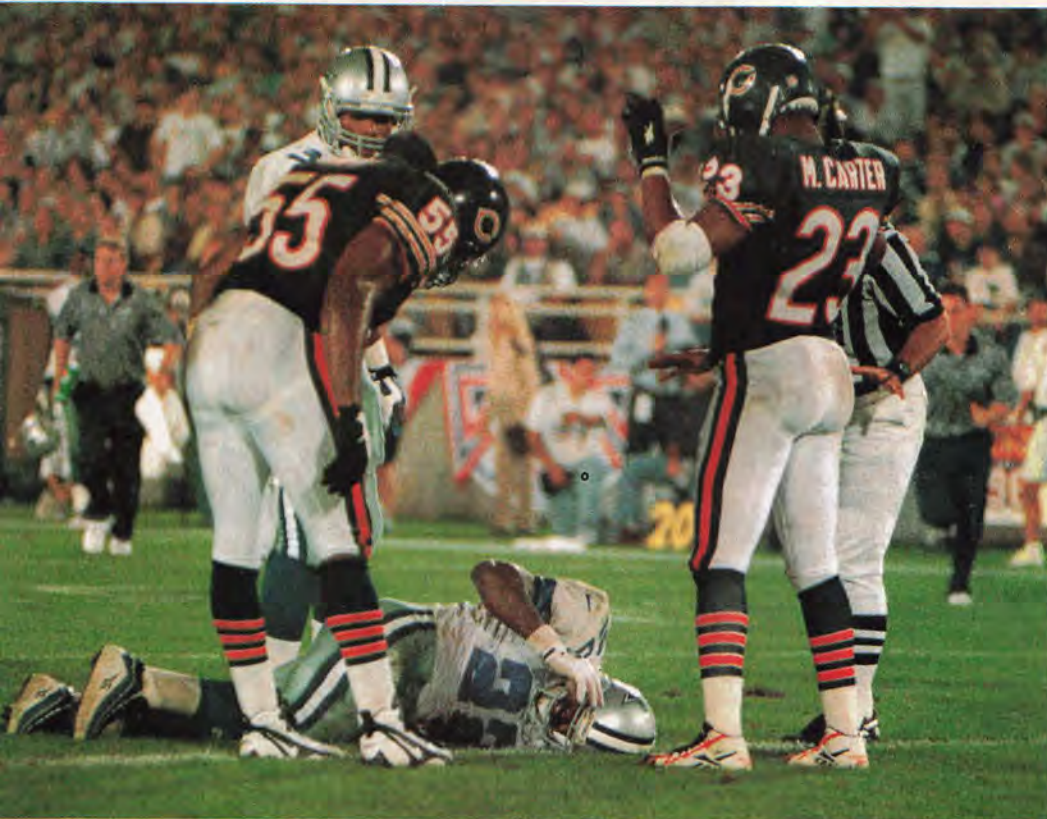
"EMMITT" IS THIS COWBOYS GREAT AN INJURY- CONQUERING WARRIOR OR TELEVISION'S BEST ACTOR? BY SKIP BAYLESS

SMITH

negative. The following morning, Emmitt wore a neck brace that forced him to talk through clenched teeth as he did a TV interview. He talked about how horrified he had been by the prospect of paralysis—yet said he could have walked off the field had the doctors let him.

Meanwhile, back at Valley Ranch, where the Cowboys train just outside Dallas, several amused

TOM D'ARCE



AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

players said Emmitt had just experienced a "burner"—a bolt of electrical pain that causes temporary tingling or numbness in the arms or hands. Most players shake off "burners" and keep playing.

Emmitt Smith practiced at full speed that week and played the following Sunday. Well, maybe he wasn't quite full speed. There was still the sprained knee that he said could have kept him out of the opener. And what of the sprained ankle? With Emmitt, it's nearly always something. Or is it?

Is he really one of the toughest guys in pro football? Or is he "Emmy" Smith, a melodramatic actor who enhances his tough-guy reputation by exaggerating every bump and bruise? Does he simply love to keep fans, reporters and defenders guessing about his health? Is he addicted to the attention created by the almost weekly media-driven soap opera, "Will Emmitt Play?"

Is Emmitt Smith the warrior who probably has taken more hits the last seven seasons than any NFL player? Or is he the wimp whose pain threshold sometimes seems much lower than that of most pro football players?

Emmitt can be all of the above. But always, he's an elusive contradiction. Catch 22 if you can. Year after year, de-

fenders have been trying without much success to get a handle on number 22, who at just 5-9, 209 pounds doesn't have Jim Brown's size or the speed or moves of Walter Payton or O.J. Simpson. So how is it that Emmitt has won four of the last five rushing titles and has carried the Cowboys to three of the last four Super Bowl championships? Because he's a one-and-only, on and off the field.

Says Chicago Bears coach Dave Wannstedt, who was defensive coordinator in Dallas when Emmitt was drafted: "You have to throw the size, speed, strength out the window. You look at that stuff and you'll come up with 10 backs you think are better. But there's just something about Emmitt that's God-given that he keeps calling on week after week, year after year. He just has this desire to be the best, to win, to prove everybody wrong and himself right."

That began when, incredibly, the first 16 teams drafting in 1990 passed on Emmitt, who was leaving Florida a year early. In fact, Dallas, which had just traded for running back Terence Flagler, might not have taken Emmitt had Pittsburgh not been so persistent about wanting to trade down four places in the first round, from No. 17 to the Cowboys' No. 21. The Steel-

ers wanted tight end Eric Green, who they figured would still be available at No. 21. So two weeks before the draft, Steelers personnel director Tom Donahoe called John Wooten, who then held a similar position in Dallas, to say Pittsburgh would take the Cowboys' third-round pick to swap first-round places.

Pittsburgh got Green and journeyman defensive tackle Craig Veasey, but Jimmy Johnson, then head coach in Dallas, got a little big man who soon would prove to be the NFL's most productive back and the cornerstone for a dynasty.

Says Wooten, now director of college scouting for Philadelphia: "[Veteran Cowboys scout] Walt Yowarsky pushed very hard for Emmitt. Walt said he was the most complete back he'd ever seen—running, catching

**Paralysis?
America
held its
breath, but
Emmitt
played the
next week.**

and blocking."

The raps on Emmitt were that he couldn't run the 40-yard dash in under 4.5 seconds, that he was injury-prone and that he didn't weigh 230 pounds (a big negative for power-running teams like Pittsburgh).

So here came Emmitt to a rebuilding Dallas with a 230-pound chip on his shoulder. "I am not the 17th-best player in the draft," he announced the day he became a Cowboy, much to Johnson's delight.

Yet as Emmitt spoke at that welcome-to-Dallas news conference, his attire caused private wincing among Cowboys officials. Their first-round pick wore a yellow shorts-and-shirt ensemble with large purple polka dots that he might have borrowed from a Florida retiree.

Emmitt immediately was taken under the wing of Michael Irvin, who led the Cowboys in sartorial and street savvy. Irvin grew up quickly on the rough side of Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; Emmitt was still living at home with his parents in Pensacola. Emmitt was amazed by how much Irvin knew about life, by how Irvin's fireworks display of a personality could take over locker rooms and games and by how Irvin's gift of gab rivaled Kings from Martin Luther to Don.

"No one in this league can talk the way Michael Irvin can talk," Emmitt says, with wide-eyed awe.

"Michael taught Emmitt a lot in his first couple of years," Wooten says.

Timeout.

**"If we gave out letters,
Emmitt would wear his
letter jacket to the mall."**

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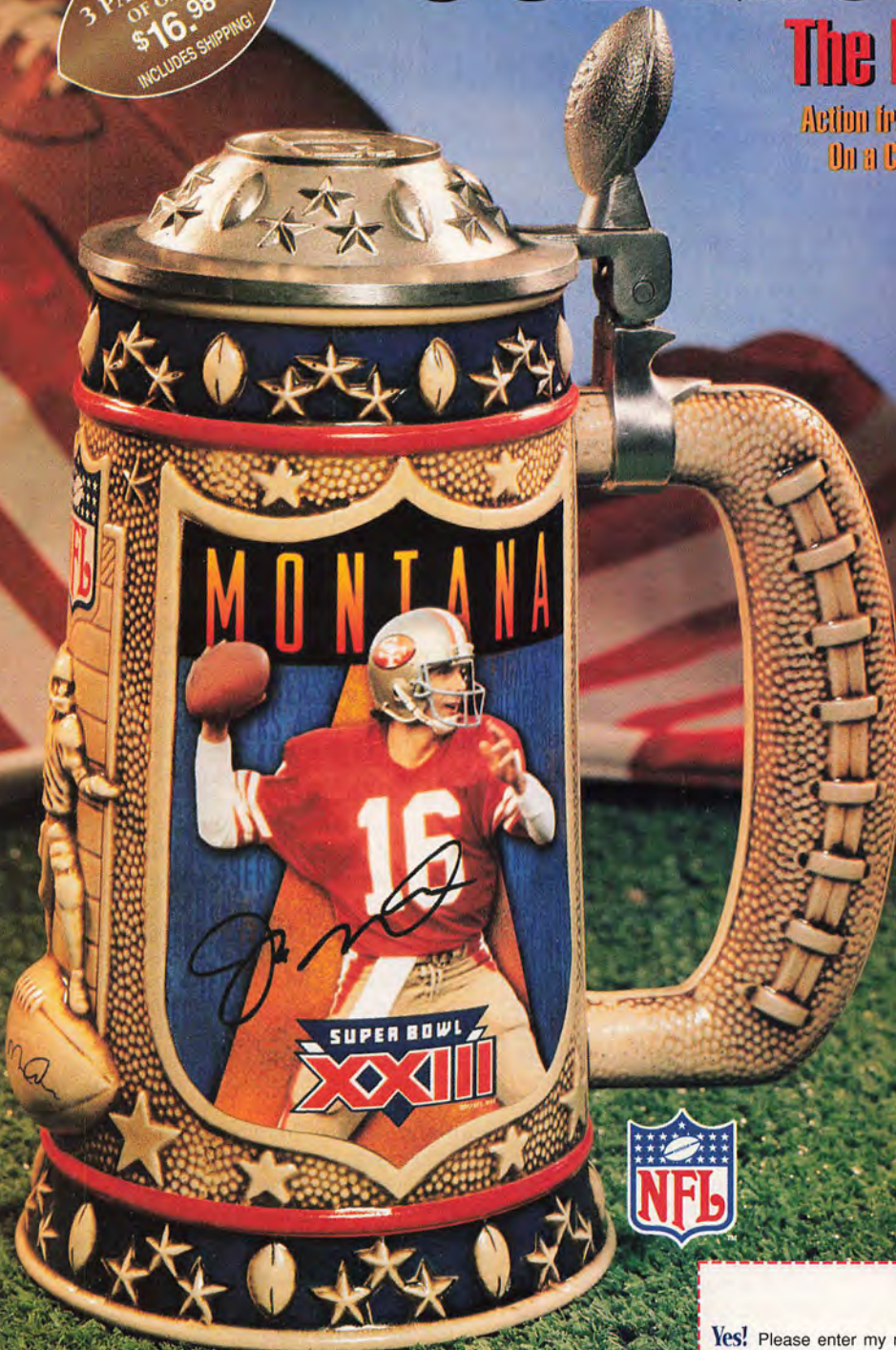
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like a real football!*



Michael Irvin? The man who would end up serving a five-game suspension for pleading no-contest to a felony charge of cocaine possession after being caught in a motel room with drugs and topless dancers has been Emmitt's big-brother role model?

Another contradiction: As much as Emmitt admires Irvin, his parents instilled in him a strong-enough sense of right and wrong that he refrained from

emulating Irvin's most dangerous after-hour habits.

At times, Emmitt probably lived vicariously through Irvin, the Midnight Cowboy, yet even today Emmitt is 27 going

on 14, a homebody who enjoys cartoons and video games. When honored at banquets, he usually is accompanied by his mother. If he has a steady girlfriend, he has kept the relationship extremely private. One reason he continued returning to the University of Florida during off-seasons until he finally earned his undergraduate degree in public recreation last May was that he simply loves being around college kids.

Emmitt says playing football remains just as much fun as it was when he scored his first Pop Warner touchdown. Emmitt's easy smile is so captivating because it's so genuine. Kids gravitate to him because they sense he's still a kid. Emmitt loves life. He still can't believe so many people love him just because he can do something that comes so inexplicably naturally to him.

Despite their differences, Emmitt was taken under the wing of street-savvy Michael Irvin.

"If we gave out letters, Emmitt would wear his letter jacket to the mall," Cowboys PR director Rich Dalrymple says.

This is one superstar who—just when he had Cowboys owner Jerry Jones right where he wanted him in September 1993—took less money than he deserved to end his holdout and save the day for a team that started 0-2. Naturally, Emmitt went on to become the NFL and Super Bowl MVP.

Yet just when you're ready to label Emmitt the Star Who Would Play For Free, he slips out of your grasp. He and his family and entourage of agents and advisors are hard-driving marketers intent on maximizing his off-field income. Several sources in Emmitt's camp say the many hours he invests in commer-

cial-making and appearances allow him to equal or better his annual Cowboys income. That's stunning when you con-

sider that in August Jones awarded Emmitt with an eight-year, \$42.5 million contract.

So how could Jones sink that much long-term salary-cap money into a running back entering his seventh season? Don't most workhorse backs begin to lose their hunger, resiliency and edge after four or five seasons?

Is Emmitt addicted to the attention created by the almost weekly media-driven soap opera, "Will Emmitt Play?"

Through his first six years, Emmitt ran the ball 2,286 times, mostly through the most dangerous traffic, between the tackles. He caught the ball 338 times. After each game, he says, he feels like he has been in a car wreck.

Yet this is a "kid" who says he'll play as long as it takes him to break Walter Payton's all-time rushing record of 16,726 yards, achieved in 13 seasons. "I love to shock the world," Emmitt says with a giant smile. Despite the almost weekly Emmitt Injury Watch, he remarkably has missed only one start in his career—a meaningless season-ender at Giants Stadium in 1994 after the Cowboys had clinched the division. He was resting a hamstring he strained five days earlier on "Monday Night Football."


Yet—whoops, there he goes again—this is also the Emmitt who has frustrated coaches who have tried to instill in him a stronger workout ethic. Emmitt, stocky by nature, gains weight easily in the off-season. While Cowboys coaches gently have tried to make Emmitt aware that Payton was an off-season workout warrior, Emmitt wasn't much for physical activity until the last couple off-seasons. Yes, the same Emmitt who did the "some guys work harder in the preseason" commercials for Reebok has never been an attentive practice player or a consistent weight-room visitor.

In 1994, Barry Switzer's first season as coach, Switzer naively blurted out in a news conference something his assistants had been telling him: "Emmitt needs to work harder in the weight room" if he's going to catch Payton. Switzer basically wound up apologizing to Emmitt. Proud and sensitive, Emmitt is easily offended by the slightest criticism of his performance or conditioning.

"He is his own man," says Switzer, who handles Emmitt with kid gloves.

For a while, Emmitt also frustrated





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former Cowboys offensive coordinator Norv Turner, who could be heard from his press-box perch yelling, "Hit the hole!" Emmitt, following his own rare radar, often didn't run plays as they were designed. So, says current Cowboys running backs coach Joe Brodsky, "We gave up and told the linemen, 'Just get your guy.'" The Cowboys' running game became the NFL's simplest: drive-block the guy across from you while number 22 goes where his heart takes him.

For his size, Emmitt can leg-press as much weight as anyone on the team. "His power," says Brodsky, "comes from the waist down." Underestimated power generating quicker-than-the-eye bursts. "Incredible quickness in a confined space," says Turner, now the Washington Redskins' head coach. Ducking and darting behind massive blockers, Emmitt is Earl Campbell one second, Barry Sanders the next. Again, the contradiction: He's a pile-driving water bug who usually hits defenders much harder than they're able to hit him. How many great backs are also great blockers? Emmitt is the

game's most devastating blitz-pickup blocker.

Says former Cowboys assistant John Blake, now head coach at Oklahoma: "Emmitt's essence is his will. He doesn't wear you down physically, but mentally. He

frustrates a defense because, by the fourth quarter, his legs are still churning just as hard. Finally, one guy doesn't wrap him up and he's gone."

The New York Giants learned that the hard way on the cold, dark 1993 afternoon at the Meadowlands when Emmitt made his reputation as perhaps the NFL's toughest back. That final regular-season game was for the division title. Near the end of the first half, Emmitt suffered a grade-two shoulder separation. In recent years, Cowboys Darren Woodson and Dixon Edwards have played most of the season with similar injuries. Emmitt cried at halftime and as usual refused a pain-killing injection—he hates needles. Yet, dragging his arm like a broken wing, Emmitt dominated a game the Cowboys finally won in overtime. John Madden called it "the most courageous performance I've ever seen."

Was the pain excruciating? Or was Emmitt lulling the Giants while setting himself up to win a Purple Heart. He

"You have to throw the size, speed, strength out the window [or] you'll come up with 10 backs who you think are better."

loves to keep the world guessing.

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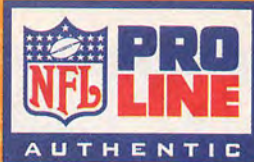
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HOTSHOT

Kordell Stewart

The Pittsburgh Steelers' Kordell Stewart would prefer never to line up as a running back or wide receiver. He has other things, bigger things, in mind.

"Quarterback," Stewart says emphatically. "That's what I want to do. That's what I *will* do. I've been determined to do that from day one."

Stewart, the Steelers' second-round draft choice from Colorado in 1995, has electrified the NFL in his first two seasons as Slash—a QB/wide receiver/running back. Last year, with veteran Neil O'Donnell at quarterback and injuries to Pittsburgh wide receivers, coach Bill Cowher asked Stewart to help out at receiver.

Thus, the slash was born. But who knew that Stewart would grow up so quickly? Cowher experimented. The offense broke the huddle and Stewart sometimes would line up at quarterback and O'Donnell at wide receiver. The alignment confounded defenses. Stewart even set up as a running back on occasion.

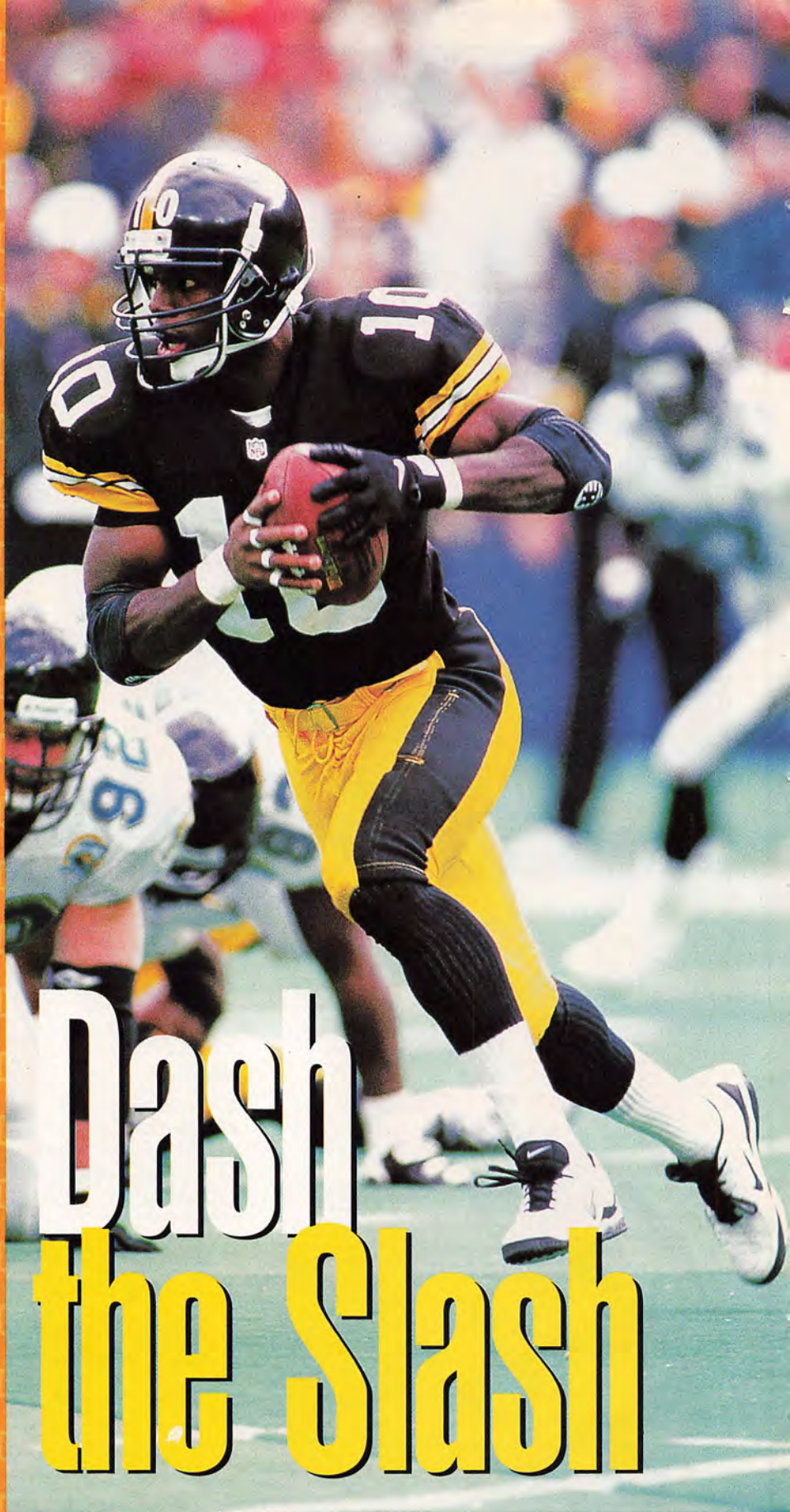
He has done it all. His first NFL pass completion was for a touchdown. He has scored on a 71-yard reception. He has taken a handoff and run 22 yards for a TD. He's even pitched the ball for a two-point conversion. Last season, he converted 30 first downs—14 rushes, 13 receptions and three passes—in 36 chances.

It's been fun, but Stewart says he'd like to concentrate on his determined career path—quarterback.

"I want to run the show," he says. "I don't want to sit there in the huddle and hear a guy call the play and have to get out there and run routes. Quarterback is my thing and that's what I want to do."

For now, he is content with the role of Slash, but he'd prefer to be called by another name: Starting Quarterback.

—Ed Bouchette



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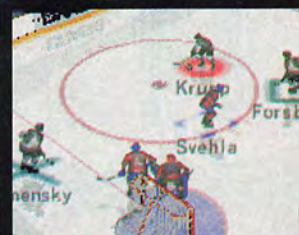
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"NOT ONLY IS GREEN BAY 'AMERICA'S TEAM,' " SAYS PACKERS HALL OF Famer Ray Nitschke, "but it represents everything people would like to think America stands for. From the structure of the team to the character of the players to the community they play in, Green Bay is the greatest place in the world to play football. It's a great place to raise a family. It's a great place to live."

Nitschke is just part of the Titledown mythology. A hard-nosed linebacker during

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PACKER-MANIA IS SWEEPING THE COUNTRY AS DESTINY'S TEAM TRIES

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TO RETURN THE LOMBARDI TROPHY TO GREEN BAY/BY GREG GUSS

CHEESE

the Lombardi era, Nitschke is still listed in the local phone book and claims to be "just another private citizen" among the 96,466 residing in Green Bay. One of two original NFL franchises still in existence, the Packers have won an unprecedented 11 championships and have sold out games for 36 straight years. If Rip Van Winkle had slept the 20 years between Nitschke's retirement and Brett Favre's arrival, he would have awakened to discover a city in a time warp.

Green Bay is located 214 miles north of Chicago, Nitschke's former hometown.



And as the soaring skyscrapers of America's Second City recede into the bucolic dairyland of Wisconsin, a subtle and amazing transformation takes place. As highway 43 snakes its way along the western shoreline of Lake Michigan toward the Canadian border, it passes

The Packers' inflated importance in the lives of the citizens of Green Bay is not normal, but then again, the Packers are anything but a normal team. Especially when compared to their archnemesis, the Dallas Cowboys, and the America they have come to represent, the Packers appear to be destiny's team.

The Packers are the only publicly owned, non-profit organization in major American sports. A total of 4,634 shares is owned by 1,915 shareholders in all 50 states and three foreign countries, and no dividend has ever or will ever be paid on that investment. There is no media-mongering megalomaniac owner squeezing out champion coaches and making deals with soft drink companies in open defiance of the rest of the league. In fact, you can't even get a Pepsi at Lambeau.

gie White, Mark Chmura, Kent Ruetters and Keith Jackson," continues Jadin, who points out that the Packers and Cowboys have undergone a complete role reversal over the past decade.

"We went through a very ugly period about 10 years ago where Green Bay suffered from the Packers not only on the field but off. You had the Mossy Cades of the world raping his aunt and James Lofton being caught in a stairway with a lady who alleged sexual assault. Compare that with the Roger Staubach-era image the Cowboys had and you see how different things are now."

But as wide as the perceived disparity is between the character of the Packers and Cowboys, the most shocking revelation may be that these Packers can play football.

BOB ROSATO

"Everybody wears green and gold. You don't see that in L.A. or New York." —Mayor Paul Jadin



BRUCE SCHWARTZMAN

through towns like Sheboygan and Manitowoc before crossing into this blue-collar community in the heart of the Fox River Valley.

To the accidental tourist, Green Bay very well could be the

Favre (above) and White (92) are hoping destiny smiles on Green Bay for the first time in nearly 30 years.



archetypal Midwestern town—its purity, simplicity and hospitality are as fresh as the arctic snow that sweeps down from Thunder Bay and blankets Wisconsin during the short days and long nights between Thanksgiving and Groundhog Day.

Should that traveler's peregrinations lead him just west of Broadway on a particular winter's Sunday, however, he would discover that which separates Green Bay from Ashwaubenon, Little Chute, Oshkosh and even Milwaukee: a low-lying 60,000-plus-seat green and yellow bowl, casually nestled among the houses and businesses along Lombardi Avenue. This emerald and gold anomaly is Lambeau Field, home of the Packers, the NFL's crown jewel.

Try an RC Cola instead!

In Green Bay, the NFL's Most Valuable Player can step forward and admit an addiction to painkillers. Far from being ostracized, quarterback Favre has been lauded for showing the courage to seek help. Perhaps Cowboys wide receiver Michael Irvin would have felt comfortable admitting that he had committed a crime had he played in Little GB instead of Big D.

"Clearly, the Packers more or less define Green Bay," says the city's mayor, Paul Jadin. "There's a chemistry with this team that's uncanny in how it fits in with a community of 100,000 people."

"We very much appreciate having a team that is not only a good product on the field, but also represents us well, with people like Reg-

Green Bay may be this year's Cinderella, but the Packers may not need a glass slipper to win Super Bowl XXXI.

"I feel like we're the team to beat," says Favre, who hopes to help end 30 years of futility in Tittletown. "Dallas has won three of the last four, so give them their credit. But we've got some hungry guys, and each year we've made nothin' but strides. Plus, the Super Bowl's in New Orleans and that's pretty much home to me. So we've got to be there."

Not only do the stars in the sky seem to be aligned correctly—Favre grew up in Kiln, Miss., 50 miles from New Orleans, and 1997 marks the 30th anniversary of Green Bay's victory in Super Bowl I—but the stars on the field are as formidable as on any team in football and as popular as any since Bart

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What would inspire a responsible, working-class adult to wear a 40-ounce triangular wedge of squishy yellow Styrofoam on his or her head for an entire day? The answer is the Green Bay Packers and the football frenzy in which Wisconsin finds itself as the Pack tunes up for its long-anticipated run at the Super Bowl.

Very likely, all of Green Bay's 96,466 residents are Packer backers, but they're not all cheeseheads.

"I find them nauseating," says Lee Remmel, Packers executive director of public relations and Lombardi-era veteran, "because they look like idiots, and there are a lot of intelligent football fans up here who unfortunately get tarred with the same brush."

It was shocking to find that, of all places, cheesehead might not be welcome in Green Bay. "Could it be that this seemingly benevolent and light-hearted national phenomenon is actually seen as a plague by the denizens from whence it originated?" I asked myself. So, like any self-respecting investigative journalist, I bought myself some Packers-processed Cheddar and went incognito as a cheesehead.

Aside from the stench (more pungent than Gorgonzola, less zesty than Camembert), I was surprised by how heavy my imitation cheese hat felt on my head. Feeling a bit self-conscious at the register as I paid \$16.99 for a chapeau that would have spelled Napoleon's demise, I received some support from a couple fans behind me in line. Far from being humiliated for wearing a block of cheese on my head on a Wednesday afternoon in a mall parking lot, I received several

friendly smiles and a couple "Go Pack!" shouts on the way to my car. Being a cheesehead is cool, I thought.

And the players seem to agree. "There are cheeseheads everywhere," says Packers running back Edgar Bennett. "It's Packer-mania and it's the best place in the world to play football."

Cheeseheads have become so popular in Green Bay, in fact, that an

THE CHEESEHEAD CONTROVERSY



entire cheese wardrobe can be had for the serious (or seriously inebriated) fan. Other cheese items include baseball hats, cowboy hats, neckties, and helmets.

In retail terms, the cheese is as hot as the Pack. The ShopKo employee who helped me find the perfect cheesehead (one size fits all, though some have

better markings than others) said that, during the week of a home game, she may sell in excess of 100 wedges.

So, flanked by an army of several thousand yellow-helmeted warriors, I entered the Lambeau Field parking-lot tailgate feeling like a triumphant soldier parading down Main Street. Babies pointed and giggled. Complete strangers gave me high-fives and offered slabs of authentic Green Bay bratwurst to a true Packer backer.

But as I passed the Packer Pro Shop at the north end of the stadium, a man yelled, "Take that thing off!" Then, while standing and admiring a white goat named Butt-Head who had been painted green and yellow for the game, a security guard offered some insight into the cheesehead controversy. "Personally," he said, "I think they're ridiculous-looking. I mean, I love the Packers and I would *never* wear that thing in public. But if that's how fans want to show their support, it's a free country."

Starr lined up behind center and Vince Lombardi prowled the sidelines.

Aside from boasting the NFL's most prolific touchdown passer, Green Bay's offense includes 1,000-yard rusher Edgar Bennett, two Pro Bowl tight ends in Mark Chmura and Keith Jackson, and a defense led by NFL career sack leader Reggie White and fellow Pro Bowlers Sean Jones, LeRoy Butler and

seeing superstars like Shaquille O'Neal and Barry Bonds and Deion Sanders, and their larger-than-life mystique quickly diminishes. What could be the thrill of a lifetime to a young Cowboys fan can be commonplace to the veteran sportswriter.

But every once in a while an event occurs that restores perspective on what it's like to interact with millionaire athletes. One such

jersey and cradling a football. "I've been trying all week to get Brett Favre's autograph," he said. "We're going to the Super Bowl this year, ya know."

Lee Rummel, Packers executive director of public relations, says the lunacy has reached a new level in Green Bay this year. "I've seen grown men in their 50s racing across the parking lot to get Brett Favre's autograph," says Rummel. "And I think to myself, 'Man, you've got to be out of your mind. I would never do that.'"

But if that autograph or that exchange between player and fan is the link between generations of Packers fans and teams, then perhaps it's not so crazy. If sports is the vehicle that brings together a community as wholesome as Green Bay, then perhaps barbecuing bratwurst in sub-zero temperatures in a stadium parking lot three hours before kickoff isn't as insane as it may appear.

For running back Edgar Bennett and the talented Packers, winning, like in Lombardi's day, is the only thing.

Around the corner at the Packer Pro Shop, a line of more than 50 people stood in the drizzle. This line was not for tickets but for the opportunity to buy cheeseheads and Favre jerseys, Reggie White candy bars and Robert Brooks cassettes.

Brooks, whose hip-hop song "Jump in the Stands" has been as popular in Green Bay as his actual leaps into the crowd after touchdown receptions, says the Packers want to acknowledge tradition while creating their own.

"We want to separate our-

selves from the Packers teams of the '60s, but we've also got to look at what they've done and try to build on it," Brooks says. "They've won their championships and we're still trying to win ours."

Says Favre: "I feel very fortunate, not only to be a quarterback in the NFL but to be Green Bay's quarterback. It's just a wonderful place to play and I tell people that all the time. But until they come here and actually sit in that stadium and experience it firsthand, they'll never understand." ★

"I've been trying all week to get Brett Favre's autograph. We're going to the Super Bowl this year, ya know." —8-year-old fan David

Eugene Robinson—enough to offset the absence of 1,000-yard receiver Robert Brooks, lost for the season with a knee injury.

"We know we're a talented team," says head coach Mike Holmgren, whose .610 winning percentage ranks third among Packers coaches behind Lombardi and Packers founder Curly Lambeau. "But it doesn't do us any good to talk about how good we are. We have to prove it."

For Holmgren and the rest of the Pack, that proof could come in the form of home-field advantage throughout the playoffs. Ah yes, Green Bay in January. There isn't a Packers coach, player or fan who wouldn't love to see the Cowboys freeze their 10-gallon hats and gold chains off on the frozen tundra of Lambeau Field.

AS A JOURNALIST, IT'S EASY TO become jaded. You grow accustomed to

occasion took place in Green Bay earlier this year. I found myself in a Packers film room with Brett Favre. The interview had been set up in advance. We talked for 20 minutes, then shook hands as we parted. But until I stepped outside the building to go to my car, I hadn't realized how much I take for granted, nor how much Favre and the Packers mean to Green Bay and the state of Wisconsin.

It was a cold, dreary Saturday morning with an unfriendly breeze and a dark, foreboding sky. Yet outside the players' exit from Lambeau, a crowd of more than 1,500 fans, young and old, waited anxiously for their heroes to run the autograph gauntlet to the players' parking lot.

Eight-year-old David was among those waiting in the cold, wearing a Favre



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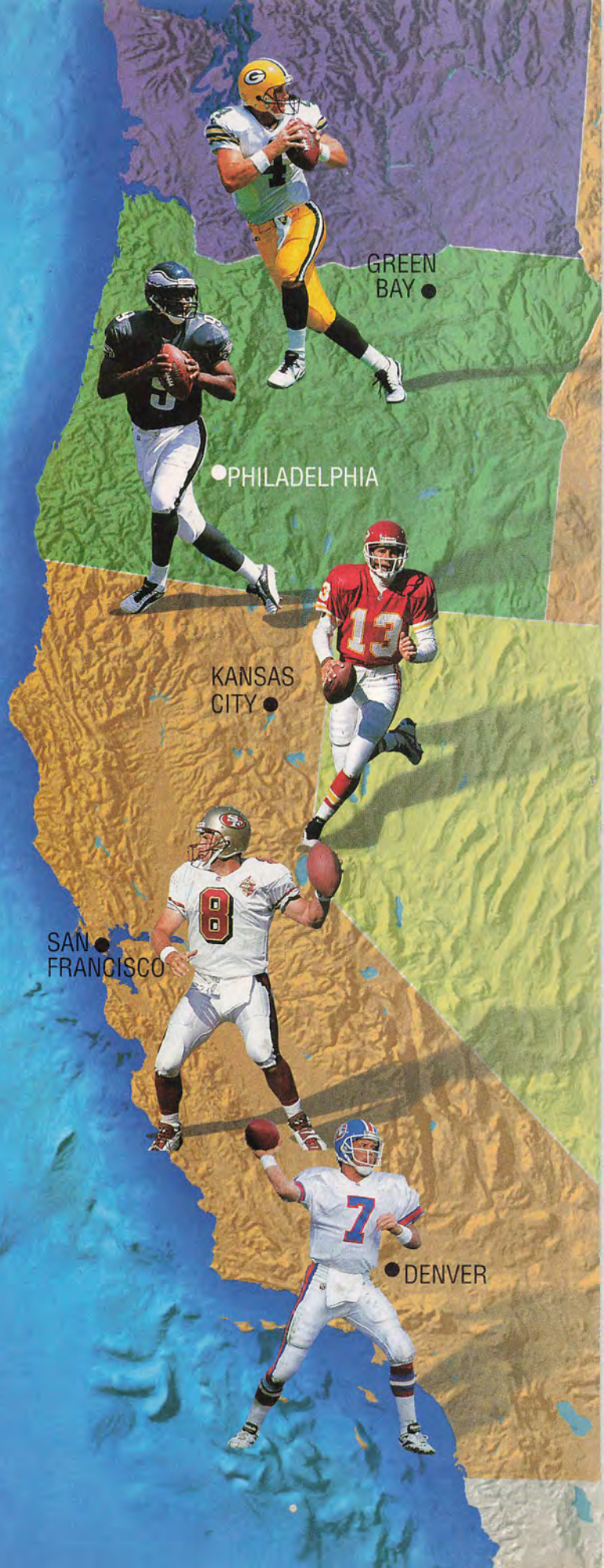
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THE WEST COAST OFFENSE IS
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THE NFL MAP/BY MICHAEL BRADLEY

WHEN MIKE SHANAHAN TOOK OVER AS coach of the Denver Broncos before the 1995 season, it didn't matter to him that quarterback John Elway had played in three Super Bowls and amassed more than 35,000 passing yards. Shanahan still felt he had to treat the 35-year-old Elway as a rookie. Elway didn't have to perform the Stanford fight song during a training-camp meal, but the big-armed passer, as if he were a novice, did receive a step-by-step introduction to Shanahan's version of the San Francisco 49ers offense.

First came the philosophy. Then the basic concepts. By the time camp concluded, Shanahan had added the details, and Elway looked like a 13-year NFL veteran again. Sixteen games later, Elway had thrown for 3,970 yards (his second-best figure) and a career-high 26 touchdowns.

"I had to work with him on coverages and passing progressions," Shanahan says. "John has experience under



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fire, and he was able to recognize who the second and third receivers on a play were faster than a rookie. But we had to start with the basics and then throw more on."

Any time a coach installs a new offense, there's a period when players, particularly quarterbacks, must adjust to new terminologies, formations and concepts. But Shanahan didn't arrive in Denver with just any old offensive philosophy. He was fresh from a three-year stint as offensive coordinator with the 49ers, for whom he had directed the potent and somewhat mythical West Coast Offense. The scheme, made famous by Bill Walsh, helped produce five Super Bowl titles for San Francisco and spawned a legion of coaches—like Shanahan—who brought the attack's principles to other NFL outposts. The West Coast Offense is patient. It's diversified. And it's successful. Four of the NFL's top seven total-offense leaders in '95 used some variation on the Walsh theme. The league's MVP, Green Bay quarterback Brett Favre, operated in the West Coast Offense. Joe Montana became a legend because of it.

Learning the offense and its myriad variations required a significant commitment from Elway, largely because of the detail and timing involved. Although Shanahan didn't entirely duplicate the 49ers attack—Denver operated from the shotgun frequently in '95, something San Francisco never has done—the coach did bring the West Coast's structured philosophy to Elway, who'd been allowed considerable freedom in the previous few seasons under former coach Wade Phillips.

"John could run any type of offense," Shanahan says. "And he'd had success in a number of systems before without a lot of talent around. But the West Coast gives the quarterback a chance to use all his tal-

the expansion Bengals in the early '70s, Walsh turned to the Gillman-Davis system to play ball-control with weak-armed quarterback Virgil Carter. Cincinnati wasn't exciting, but it won the AFC Central in 1970,

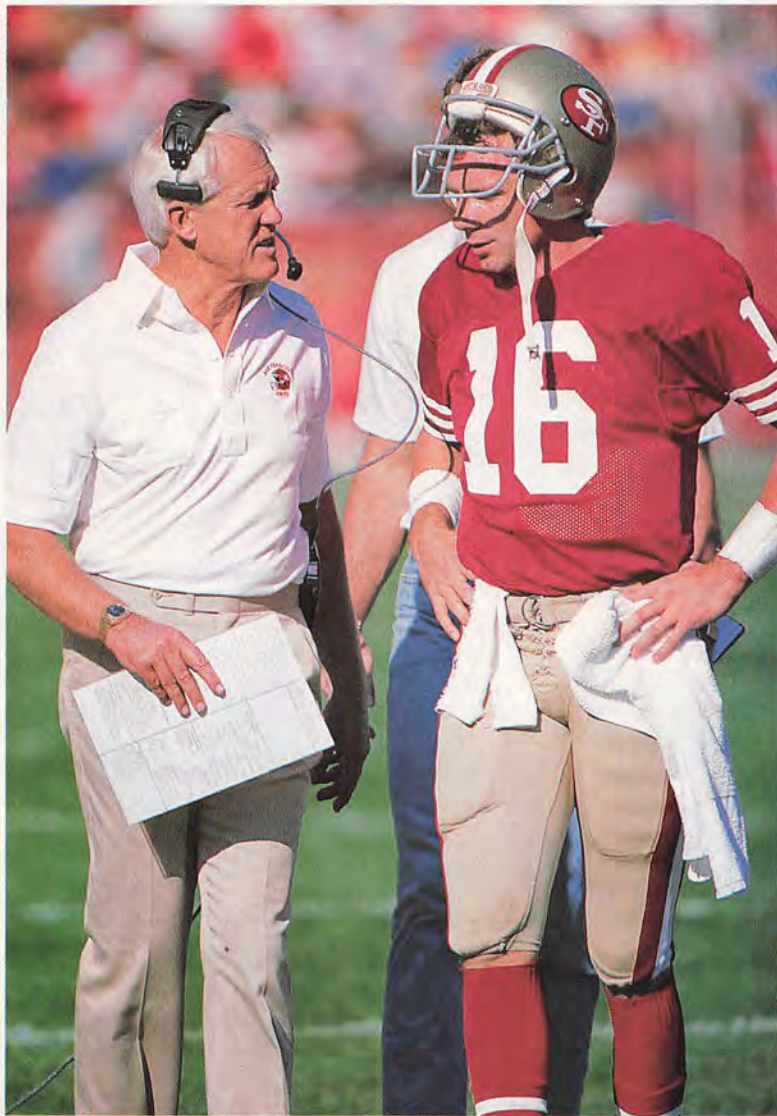
its inaugural season. In 1979, when Walsh came to San Francisco from Stanford, he installed the offense, and the 49ers have been winners ever since, first under Walsh and now George Seifert. But the attack didn't receive its current name until 1985, when after the Giants had stuffed the Niners, 17-3, in an NFC wild-card playoff game played in the frosty Meadowlands, sneering Giants coach Bill Parcells told reporters that teams couldn't win in the wintry East "with that West Coast offense."

This season, San Francisco, Green Bay, Denver, Philadelphia, Minnesota, Kansas City and even Oakland, which used to thrive on the bomb, are all considered West Coast teams and have coaches whose pedigrees traced to the Walsh football family tree. But it isn't always easy to recognize similarities among them. Denver uses the shotgun. Kansas City runs out of the I-formation.

Philadelphia runs the ball more than it passes. Green Bay relies on area blocking rather than pulling and trapping. And Oakland still throws deep fairly often. But they all embrace Walsh's West Coast commandments, even if they don't duplicate the master's methods.

Says Kansas City offensive coordinator Paul Hackett of the West Coast: "The pure offense I learned while working with the 49ers from 1983 to 1985 has been changed a great deal. Walsh kept it pretty

PAUL JASIEŃSKI



The West Coast Offense was created in the '60s, but Walsh and Montana made it into an art form in the '80s.

ents."

The attack was created in the early 1960s by San Diego Chargers coach Sid Gillman and his assistant, Al Davis. (Yes, that Al Davis.) Gillman and Davis favored quick-hitting patterns to receivers like Lance Alworth, who'd then break loose for big gains, much like San Francisco's Jerry Rice has for the past 12 seasons. Thanks to the offense, the Chargers played in five of the first six AFL title games and won the '63 championship.

While offensive coordinator for

much the same while he coached in San Francisco, but once he stepped away, it underwent changes with [former offensive coordinators] like Mike Holmgren and Mike Shanahan.

"But there are certain West Coast principles. The offense uses a lot of shallow crossing patterns underneath the linebackers, relies on precise footwork by the quarterback and his ability to read the progression of receivers, as opposed to reading the defense."

Shanahan laughs when the media categorizes any attack that features short passes as "West Coast," but that doesn't mean there aren't ways of detecting an offense directed by a Walsh disciple. First, it will be balanced. Many consider the West Coast Offense merely a passing philosophy, but they forget that the 49ers championship teams in the 1980s featured backs like Wendell Tyler and Roger Craig, each of whom was a 1,000-yard runner. Don't expect to see many four-receiver sets in the offense. "That limits you," says Walsh, who has returned to the Niners this season as an offensive consultant. All five eligible receivers (usually two wideouts, two backs and a tight end) must be able to catch and run well.

Although the Broncos let Elway operate from the shotgun, most West Coast teams favor a variety of three- and five-step drops and frequent moving of the pocket, the better to counter a good pass rush and confound coverage schemes. Defenses that are too aggressive are often burned by quick passes to receivers who catch the ball at full speed and then break free.

West Coast teams move personnel around and run variations of the same plays, so a close relationship between the passer and his backs and receivers is crucial. The offense's precision requires the quar-

Coast teams to search for bigger offensive linemen. The 49ers, however, have never had hulks along the offensive front. They have had line coach Bobb McKittrick, who's been teaching the team's intricate trapping and protection schemes for 18 years. "The West Coast Offense has more systems of pass protection than anyone else," Walsh says.

These are no absolutes, but defining characteristics. The West Coast Offense is designed for ball-control through finesse and deception, not mouth-bloodying force. It concentrates on what it's supposed to rather than reacting to what a defense allows—not easy in today's NFL world of zone blitzes and well-disguised coverages. West Coast quarterbacks rarely call audibles. Instead, they rely on their knowledge of the system and relationships with teammates to make the play that was called work. That's why Walsh would "script" the first 20 plays of every game. He didn't care about down and distance or what the defense was doing. "If you spend all your time worrying about the

defense, you give it the opportunity to dictate what you have to do," Hackett says. "The West Coast Offense believes that what it does is the most important thing. If a player is open, throw him the ball. If he isn't open, he's supposed to slide off the coverage, make eye contact with the quarterback and get open."

BECAUSE THE EAGLES WERE ONE of just four NFL teams (along with Dallas, Buffalo and Indianapolis) to attempt more runs than passes last season, offensive coordinator Jon



Though the Eagles often ran Watters, their version of the West Coast Offense netted them 10 wins and a playoff victory in '95.

terback to devote considerable attention to his mechanics. "The quarterback must spend more time on fundamentals and needs to be more detailed and thorough," Walsh says. "He needs to work on the length of the steps in his drop-back, his timing and his release point."

Linemen in the system can't be 340-pounders. They must be quick and capable of pulling or trapping on nearly every play, although Shanahan believes the growing size of defensive fronts will force West

Gruden dubbed the Philadelphia attack the "Jersey Shore Offense," figuring the Eagles were about 3,000 miles away from being a true West Coast team. It wasn't by design. Eagles coach Ray Rhodes spent 12 years as an assistant with San Francisco and developed a considerable affinity for the West Coast way, and Gruden learned the system while a receivers coach under Holmgren at Green Bay. With those backgrounds, they didn't exactly come to Philadelphia looking to resurrect the Run to Daylight philosophy.

But circumstances conspired against them. Injuries and inadequate personnel, particularly at tight end, limited the Eagles' options. And when Rodney Peete took over for Randall Cunningham at quarterback in the season's fifth week, Gruden and Rhodes were forced to constrict the team's attack and concentrate on finding ways to run the ball with halfbacks Ricky Watters and Charlie Garner. The results were still pretty good. Philadelphia won 10 regular-season games and thumped Detroit in the playoffs. Watters finished sixth in the league in rushing (1,273 yards), caught 62 passes and scored 12 times.

In the hyperprecise West Coast Offense, familiarity breeds points. "You have to draft within the same philosophy for 15 years, like the 49ers did, in order to be successful," Gruden says. "Otherwise, you have to compromise your system to allow you to function. That's what we did last year."

Favre threw 24 interceptions during the 1993 season, his first full year running the West Coast attack in Green Bay. His MVP performance

in '95 (4,413 yards, 38 TD passes, 13 interceptions) was accomplished with the same arm and the same gambler's mentality.

"I asked Brett how he went from

three decisions," Hackett says. "You can't do it in the classroom. It has to be done on the field."

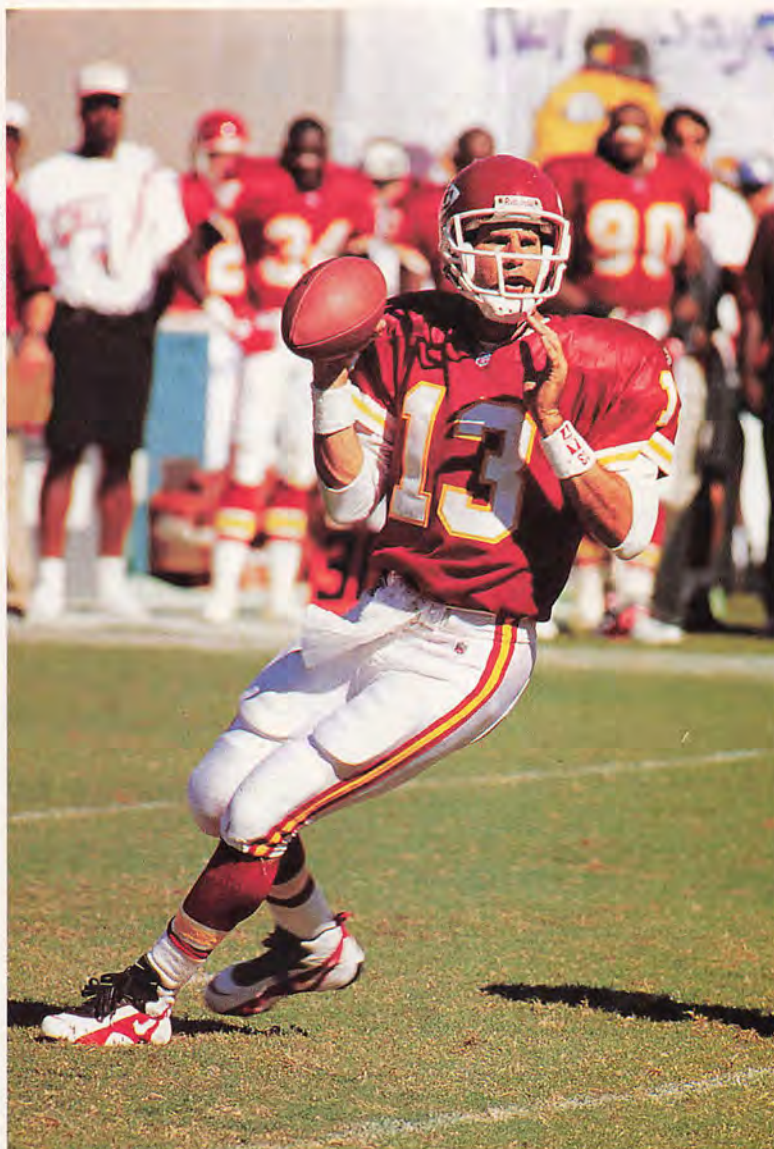
"I think the relationship between a quarterback, coach and perimeter

guys is the heart of the offense. Their ability to work together makes for championships. That takes time, maturity and repetition. Bono hadn't played much before last year, but he should come along faster than most younger quarterbacks, since he had a lot of preparation watching Montana in San Francisco."

Ah, Montana. No quarterback in NFL history was more suited for a style of offense than the 49ers legend. Under Walsh's tutelage, Montana became a West Coast maestro, capable of anticipating when his primary and even secondary receivers would be covered and then finding the third option—just about every time. That proficiency was developed through hours of film work, countless practice drills designed to force the quarterback to throw to the second or third receiver—often from an awkward position—and years of familiarity with the Niners' other offensive components.

"Joe was quick on his feet, was nimble enough to avoid people, had great instincts and a beautiful touch on the ball," Walsh says. "It could well have been that Joe might not have been a great quarterback in another system. He might not have made the team. We didn't demand a Terry Bradshaw arm. We wanted touch and feel and timing."

And that doesn't come overnight, even for the greatest players. Or systems. ★



The Chiefs' Bono knows the West Coast Offense, having studied it behind the great Montana in San Francisco.

24 interceptions to 38 touchdowns, and he told me, 'I finally feel comfortable,' " Hackett says. "He was the same Brett Favre as he always was, but he'd matured within the offense."

In Kansas City, Hackett expected Steve Bono, who had a solid starting debut in '95 (3,121 yards, 21 TDs, 10 INTs), to be much improved this season.

"The toughest part is the decision-making process and how to get a young guy enough practice turns at making those one-two-

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How to Beat the West Coast 49ers

Over the last year, two coaches—one a West Coast Offense disciple and another who specializes in ingenious defensive schemes—have provided textbook examples of how to use and exploit the vaunted West Coast Offense to beat the 49ers.

Packers head coach Mike Holmgren, a former quarterbacks coach for the 49ers, crafted a defensive game plan in the playoffs last year to contain the great Jerry Rice. By keeping the cornerbacks from

being overly aggressive, Holmgren's scheme allowed Rice 11 receptions, but none of which amounted to a touchdown or a big-gainer. On offense, Holmgren exploited the relatively slow San Francisco linebackers by sending the speedier of the two Packers tight ends, Keith Jackson, on routes down the middle. Jackson caught four balls for 101 yards and a touchdown as Green Bay built an insurmountable 21-0 lead.

In beating the Niners two of the first three times he faced them, Carolina head coach Dom Capers, whose zone-blitz defense has been copied as much as the West Coast Offense, used only

two down linemen and four or even five linebackers to force the run and block the inside passing lanes.

In the first of the two matchups against the Panthers this season, Rice again had his catches—this time 10—but couldn't find the end zone, and quarterback Steve Young failed to hit a Niners tight end all day. San Francisco totaled 48 rushing yards from its ineffective running attack and never was really in the game.

Future 49ers opponents might want to take a lesson from those matchups.

—Paul M. Johnson

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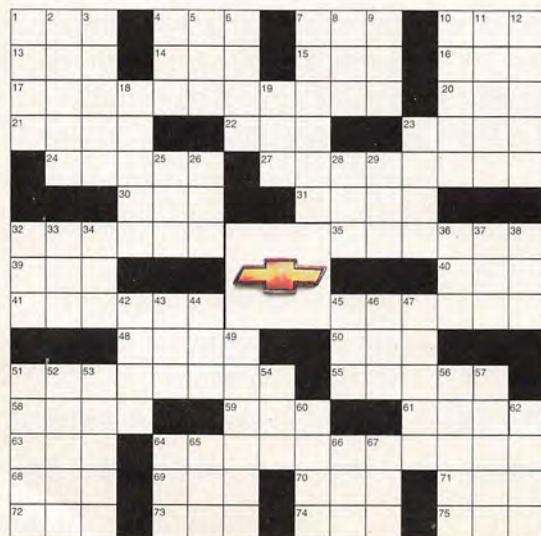


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16. Suffix for scram
17. Czech track star at Helsinki in '52: 2 wds.
20. Washington Senator, for short
21. Sensible
22. Monogram of the '61 NFL MVP
23. Japanese sport
24. Blue ___ (35 Across player)
27. NBA Rookie of the Year in '89-90
30. ___-road racing
31. Costa ___
32. Quarterback's call
35. Chicago school
39. Kind of poem
40. Highway: abbr.
41. Uecker and Karras each starred in one
45. Emulated Wilt
48. Bullfight cheers
50. Randy Gradishar's alma mater: abbr.
51. NFL scoring leader in '63
55. Baseball collectibles
58. Around the ___ (from third base to second to first)
59. "That's amazing!"
61. Biondi or Batts
63. Ivy Leaguer
64. Newest member of the 3,000 Hit Club: 2 wds.
68. Neckline shape
69. "Bobby Hockey"
70. "Rocky III" actor: 2 wds.
71. New Year's ___
72. Golf-scorecard abbreviation
73. Steve Elkington won it in '95
74. Marv Albert's catchword
75. Look at

Down

1. Change for a five
2. Mr. Rashad
3. AL saves leader in '65
4. Nickname of the '60 World Series hero
5. Florida Citrus Bowl winner in '95: abbr.
6. Green Bay or Anaheim
7. New NBAer in '95
8. Tournament qualifying exemption
9. Sign, as a contract
10. Cooperstown nickname
11. It precedes "dome" in the Spurs' home
12. Relay-race need
18. "Clown Prince of Basketball"
19. Crew-team member
23. Center, in Canadian football
25. Horse ___ different color: 2 wds.
26. "Inside the ___" (HBO sports show)
28. Attempt, in sports headlines
29. ___ dancing (Winter Olympics event)
32. Distress signal
33. ___ Amin
34. Good return of a tough shot
36. SEC-West school: abbr.
37. Salt Lake City athlete
38. Was in first
42. Joe Louis victim of '46
43. ___ Aches and Pains (Luke Appling)
44. Todd Stottlemire's dad
45. Gooden's nickname
46. 35 Across' conference
47. "The Flying Finn"
49. Tennis Hall of Famer
51. "THE MOST DEPENDABLE, LONGEST-LASTING TRUCKS"
52. Sank, as a chip shot
53. Zodiac sign
54. Family member: abbr.
56. Open ___ (breaks in the schedule)
57. Hot ___ league (off-season activities)
60. Frank Gifford won one in '77
62. Golf obstacle, at times
64. ___ Warner Football
65. World Cup winner in '86: abbr.
66. School in Eugene: abbr.
67. New West Point grads: abbr.

See page 11 for Chevrolet Truck SPORTword Puzzle answers.

Who can flaunt more quality seniors
than any team in the nation?

Who can survive the early season
without its floor leader?

Who can push aside championship-
tested UCLA and Kentucky?

Kansas Can

Tat-tat-tat, tat-a-tat. The sound
is loud, persistent, but not bother-
some. It's kind of rhythmic—in-

creasing, then decreasing. *Tat-a-tat, tat-a-tat.* It's not long before I realize the sound is that of a basketball being dribbled on polished hardwood.

I'm smack in the middle of a wildly cheering crowd that is suddenly silenced by a mellow voice. I hear the words clearly. "At center for UMass, Marcus Camby; at guard for Georgetown, Allen Iverson." The intros continue: "At forward for Cal, Shareef Abdur-Rahim."

By Raymond Harper

BRUCE SCHWARTZMAN

ALL-CLASS OF 1997

Seniors who passed up millions just to make this team.

- C **Tim Duncan**, Wake Forest
- F **Danya Abrams**, Boston College
- F **Keith Van Horn**, Utah
- G **Shea Seals**, Tulsa
- G **Brevin Knight**, Stanford

ALL-CLASS OF 1998

Juniors who will have to choose between making millions and making SPORT's all-senior team next year.

- C **Alexander Kouf**, George Washington
- F **Danny Fortson**, Cincinnati
- F **J.R. Henderson**, UCLA
- G **Cory Carr**, Texas Tech
- G **Toby Bailey**, UCLA

ALL-CLASS OF 1999

Sophomores who may be raw, but have serious skills.

- C **Jelani McCoy**, UCLA
- F **Kenny Thomas**, New Mexico
- F **Ron Mercer**, Kentucky
- G **Vince Carter**, North Carolina
- G **Chauncey Billups**, Colorado

ALL-CLASS OF 2000

No Kobe Bryant, no Jermaine O'Neal, but these teens will be ruling the NBA alongside them in the not-so-distant future.

- C **Vassil Evtimov**, North Carolina
- F **Tim Thomas**, Villanova
- F **Winfred Walton**, Syracuse
- G **Mike Bibby**, Arizona
- G **Shaheen Holloway**, Seton Hall

ALL-NBA

Players who have NBA scouts drooling.

- C **Tim Duncan**, Wake Forest
- F **Ron Mercer**, Kentucky
- F **Keith Van Horn**, Utah
- G **Anthony Parker**, Bradley
- G **Brevin Knight**, Stanford

Then a whistle blows. The action begins. A player slashes to the basket, slamming the ball right over Camby. I scream in disgust: "Wake up, Marcus!" So loud is my admonition that I myself wake up.

What's all this hoopla? Just a dream—my mind telling me it's December, a time when the college basketball season blooms in earnest.

This year, there is no Camby, no Iverson, no Abdur-Rahim—all three opted for NBA riches as underclassmen. But college basketball goes on.

Check out SPORT's Top 20 and see which teams have the goods to contend for the NCAA title.

1. KANSAS

The Good: Jacque Vaughn, expected to return in January from a preseason wrist injury, and Jerod Haase provide quickness and punch in the backcourt. Forward Paul Pierce is a gem. Depth keeps the Jayhawks in the game, even when they're not firing on all cylinders.

The Bad: Vaughn's injury will slow the team's rise. The Jayhawks' anemic three-point attack makes it difficult for them to rally from a big deficit.

2. CINCINNATI

The Good: Big guard Damon Flint (6-5) and forward Danny Fortson return. Deadeye Darnell Burton is not shy about firing three-pointers, and the Bearcats will have their usual smothering D.

The Bad: The Cats lack a standout big man, so they may have to resort to the center-by-committee approach.

3. UCLA

The Good: On the heels of a miserable '95-'96 season, point guard Cameron Dollar is healthy, which will enable him to run the break and dish to his multitalented teammates.

The talented Bruins need a big assist from point guard Dollar, plagued last year by injury.

The Bad: The Bruins too often strive for the spectacular. The result: more turnovers than assists last year. This gang needs a floor leader.

4. UTAH

The Good: A defense that chokes off the opponent's will to win. The Utes' free-throw shooting prowess serves them well in the waning moments of tight games.

The Bad: They will miss Brandon Jessie's three-pointers. Utah also has shown a tendency to wear down late in games.

5. VILLANOVA

The Good: An infusion of youth, led by prep All-American Tim Thomas (6-10, 235), will complement shot-blocker Jason Lawson (6-11, 240) at center and Alvin Williams (11 points per game, 177 assists last year) at the point.

The Bad: Nova made 212 threes last season. Problem is, 143 of them were by guard Kerry Kittles and forward Eric Eberz, both departed.

6. KENTUCKY

The Good: Though they lost four players to the NBA, the Wildcats have stars waiting to

Look for Fortson and the Bearcats to muscle their way into the Final 4.



BRUCE L. SCHWARTZMAN

BOB ROSATO

shine—Anthony Epps, Derek Anderson and, above all, Ron Mercer.

The Bad: Inexperience on the interior. Also, last season, college teams dreaded playing the Wildcats; this year, they'll relish the chance to beat the defending champs.

7. WAKE FOREST

The Good: The Demon Deacons should benefit from last season's deep foray into the NCAA tournament. The guards can score, and big man Tim Duncan, the best player in the country, can pass.

The Bad: No post backup and high expectations might force this team to overextend itself.

8. MARQUETTE

The Good: The defensive-minded Golden Eagles will get savvy play from guards Anthony Pieper and Aaron Hutchins. Forward Chris Crawford is a steady presence inside who averaged double-figures in Conference USA last season.

The Bad: Marquette's field-goal shooting is frosty (low 40s), and the Golden Eagles are a far better team at home than on the road.

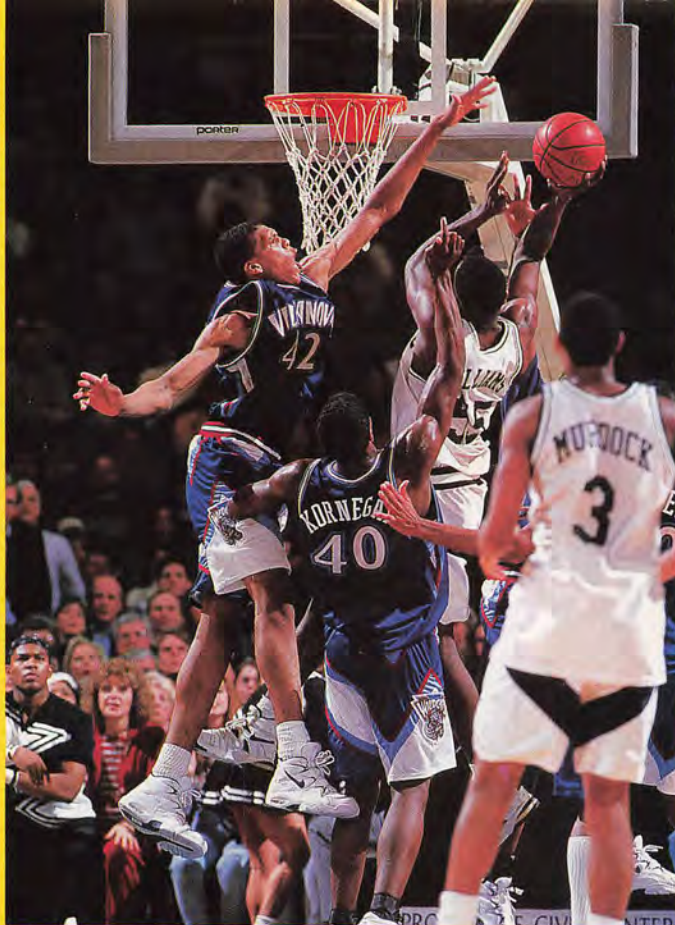
9. ILLINOIS

The Good: Four starters return.

With talented Van Horn, the Final 4 suits the Utes.



BRUCE SCHWARTZMAN



The strengths lie in the front-court, with improved board play and scoring. The Fighting Illini will get three-point shooting from a healthy Kiwane Garrison.

The Bad: Not a lot of height or bulk down low (Jerry Hester, 6-6; Jerry Gee, 6-8). In the physical Big Ten, that'll hurt.

10. FRESNO STATE

The Good: Jerry Tarkanian's Bulldogs have a torrid, pressing defense, and the points they score

off turnovers make up for foibles at the free-throw line. They also have good depth, thanks to the eligibility of several players who sat out last season.

The Bad: Fresno State plays tough against heavyweights such as New Mexico and Utah but sometimes lets down against lesser foes.

Nova will thrive with Lawson (42), who has the stuff to take the Cats far.

11. MICHIGAN

The Good: The Wolverines have power up front with Maurice Taylor and Robert Traylor, a 300-pound bull who returns from an injury. Michigan has credible perimeter shooting and, finally, a bolstered inside game.

The Bad: The Wolverines are inconsistent, especially on the road. Their focus drifts too readily and they have a propensity for unforced turnovers.

12. IOWA

The Good: Led by all-Big Ten forward Jess Settles, the Hawkeyes match up well up front with the rest of the conference. They'll be competitive and will be a bear to beat at home.

The Bad: They'll struggle mightily from the perimeter.

ALL-WITNESS RELOCATION

Impact transfers you may have forgotten about.

- C Avondre Jones, USC
- F Ruben Patterson, Cincinnati
- F Rodrick Rhodes, USC
- G Chris Herren, Fresno State
- G Richie Parker, Long Island

ALL-SUMMER FEVER

Underclassmen who figure to make themselves eligible for the '97 draft.

- C Alexander Koul, George Washington
- F Tim Thomas, Villanova
- F Maurice Taylor, Michigan
- G Ronnie Fields, no school
- G Toby Bailey, UCLA

ALL-EINSTEIN

Underclassmen who made the smart decision of not applying for the NBA draft.

- C Austin Croshere, Providence
- F Mark Sanford, Washington
- F Jess Settles, Iowa
- G Felipe Lopez, St. John's
- G Jacque Vaughn, Kansas

ALL-JOSE OFFERMAN

Underclassmen who made the error of leaving school early only to be rejected by the NBA.

- C Rashard Griffith, Wisconsin
- F Darnell Robinson, Arkansas
- F Jesse Pate, Arkansas
- G Ronnie Henderson, LSU
- G Chris Kingsbury, Iowa

ALL-PRACTICE SQUAD

Redshirts who won't be seeing action this year.

- C omm'A Givens, Pepperdine
- F Tremaine Fowlkes, Fresno State
- G Jelani Gardner, Pepperdine
- G Doug Gottlieb, no school
- G Walter Brown, Boston

ALL-BURIED TREASURE

Hidden gems tucked away in small pockets of this big nation.

- C **Garth Joseph**,
St. Rose
- F **Adonal Foyle**,
Colgate
- F **Peter Aluma**,
Liberty
- G **James Cotton**,
Long Beach State
- G **Earl Boykins**,
Eastern Michigan

ALL-DY-NO-MITE

Players who may explode this year because their coaches will depend on them more.

- C **Jason Lawson**,
Villanova
- F **Matt Harpring**,
Georgia Tech
- F **Johnny Taylor**,
Tennessee-Chattanooga
- G **Derek Anderson**,
Kentucky
- G **Chauncey Billups**,
Colorado

ALL-UPSIDE

If their improvement last year was any indication, watch out for these guys this season.

- C **Kelvin Cato**,
Iowa State
- F **Brian Skinner**,
Baylor
- F **Kris Johnson**,
UCLA
- G **Anthony Parker**,
Bradley
- G **Alvin Williams**,
Villanova

ALL-MATCHBOOK

Players who need to light a fire under their butts or risk losing NBA scouts' interest.

- C **Lorenzo Coleman**,
Tennessee Tech
- F **Jerald Honeycutt**,
Tulane
- F **Charles O'Bannon**,
UCLA
- G **James Collins**,
Florida State
- G **Harold Deane**,
Virginia

ALL-NO ARCH DELUXE

McDonald's All-Americans who have yet to make the transition to big-time college ball.

- C **Avondre Jones**,
USC
- F **Jerod Ward**,
Michigan
- F **Albert White**,
Michigan
- G **Felipe Lopez**,
St. John's
- G **God Shammgod**,
Providence



BRIAN TIRPAK

Led by supersoph Mercer, Kentucky reloads in its bid to repeat.

The Hawkeyes will have to throw some freshmen into key positions.

13. TULSA

The Good: Say "Shea Seals by the seashore" fast. There's no better guard in the country. Seals scores, rebounds and defends and will have plenty of help from forward Michael Ruffin and point guard Rod Thompson.

The Bad: Expect growing pains as Tulsa adjusts to a new conference, the WAC. Tulsa lives and dies by the three. Seals shot 201 of them last season, converting just 29 percent.

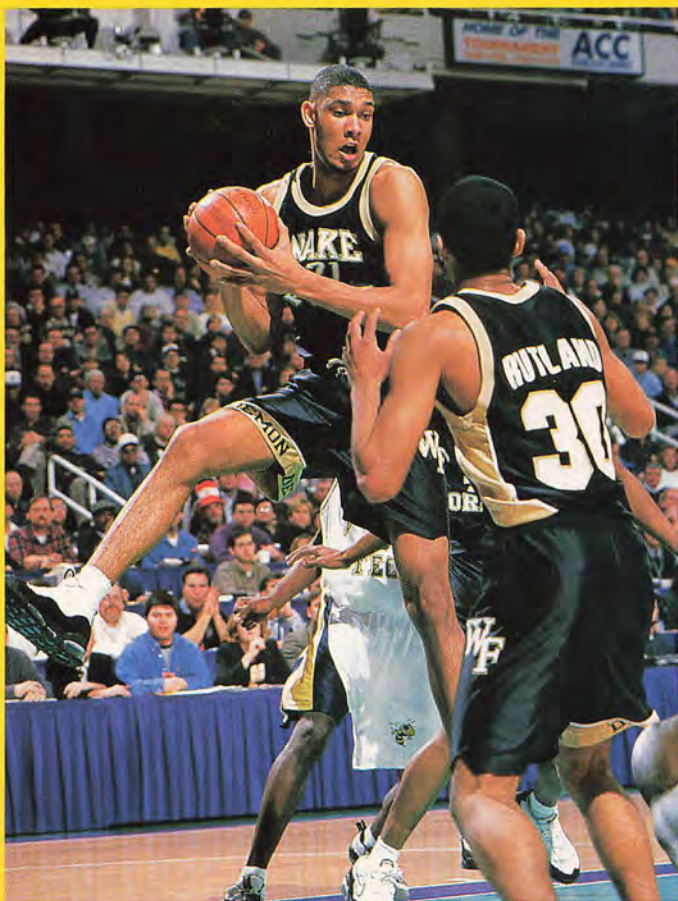
14. STANFORD

The Good: There's a lot to gush about here. Brevin Knight is The Man at the point, and Stanford is big in the trenches, led by Tim Young (7-1, 245), Mark Seaton (6-9, 220) and Pete Van Elswyk

Powered by
a formidable
front line led
by Maurice
Taylor,
Michigan
will return to
prominence.



BOB ROSATO



The nation's best player is Wake Forest's Duncan, a force in the middle.

(6-9, 230).

The Bad: The Cardinal must develop an off-guard shooter to discourage double-teams of Knight and Young.

15. TULANE

The Good: P-O-T-E-N-T-I-A-L. Four of the five starters return from a 22-10 squad. Of the Green Wave's 10 losses last year, three were by one point, two by two points. Perhaps a year of seasoning and improved free-throw efficiency will turn the tide.

The Bad: The Wave is too tentative on the glass, especially the offensive, and was last in the conference in three-point accuracy and free-throw percentage.

16. GEORGE WASHINGTON

The Good: Sophomore guard Shawnta Rogers has an assists-to-turnover ratio of better than 2:1. GW also has a rare

commodity in 7-1 Alexander Koul, a bruising rebounder with a deft hook shot that'll net him double-digit points.

The Bad: GW surrendered 72.6 points per game last season, third-most in the Atlantic 10. It also has limited speed at the 3, 4 and 5 positions.

17. TEXAS

The Good: Run, gun and then some. Led by guard Reggie Freeman, with an assist from Kris Clack and DeJuan Vazquez, this team is tournament tough. Ten of 12 pivotal Longhorns return.

The Bad: Too much reliance on Freeman, who last year scored 22.4 points per game and was the scoring leader in 24 of the team's 31 games.

18. DUKE

The Good: The Blue Devils feature stellar guard play, with quickness on offense and defense.

The Bad: Unless one of the freshmen develops quickly, the Blue Devils will be tested in the frontcourt, where they're deep

but not that experienced.

19. ARIZONA

The Good: Expectations are down in the desert due to the loss of four starters. But guards Miles Simon and Michael Dickerson return. Both can score, especially from three-point land. The Cats have won 80 percent of their games in the '90s.

The Bad: 'Zona could use a couple bangers down low.

20. NORTH CAROLINA

The Good: Coach Dean Smith.



Pint-sized Brevin Knight spearheads the potent Cardinal.

The Tar Heels shot 49 percent from the field in '95-96, proving patience is indeed a virtue.

The Bad: No three-point threat and suspect foul shooting.

ALL-IMPORT

Standouts who came from other countries.

- C Alexander Koul, George Washington
- F Adonal Foyle, Colgate
- F Peter Aluma, Liberty
- G Carmelo Travieso, Massachusetts
- G Edgar Padilla, Massachusetts

ALL-BEEF

Standouts with bulk.

- C Robert Traylor, Michigan
- F Kenny Thomas, New Mexico
- F Danny Fortson, Cincinnati
- G Isaac Fontaine, Washington State
- G Jacque Vaughn, Kansas

ALL-GARNETT

High school players who we hope go to college before they go to the NBA.

- C Chris Burgess, Irvine, Calif.
- F Lamar Odom, Queens, N.Y.
- F Shane Battier, Birmingham, Mich.
- G Schea Cotton, Bellflower, Calif.
- G Tony Harris, Memphis, Tenn.

ALL-HYBRID

Players who are 6-7 (give or take a couple inches) and can excel at several positions.

- C Marc Jackson, Temple
- F Tim Thomas, Villanova
- F Ace Custis, Virginia Tech
- G Vince Carter, North Carolina
- G Damon Flint, Cincinnati

ALL-ANN MEYERS

Women who can play ball with the big boys.

- C Kara Wolters, Connecticut
- F Chamique Holdsclaw, Tennessee
- F Kate Starbird, Stanford
- G Patricia Penicheiro, Old Dominion
- G Beth Morgan, Notre Dame

CATCH 22



A no-win situation for collegiate coaches: Land a hot recruit, but watch him develop so well that he bolts early for the NBA. There are exceptions, led by senior center sensation Tim Duncan, who will remain at Wake Forest for the duration. But perhaps a majority among the following list of the top 22 NBA prospects will ditch school to turn pro. (Listed positions are NBA projections.)

1. Tim Duncan, Wake Forest (center, senior, 6-10, 238)

Many scouts preferred Duncan over any other collegian as far back as two years ago, when he was only 18. His rebounding, defense and adept passing have been ready for the NBA game for some time now.

2. Keith Van Horn, Utah (small forward, senior, 6-9, 235)

The athletic Van Horn possesses the total package. With his size and ability to shoot from long range, he'll flourish in the pro game.

3. Anthony Parker (pictured right), Bradley (shooting guard, senior, 6-5, 190) Perhaps the best shooter in the country, Parker also possesses good rebounding and passing skills.

4. Maurice Taylor, Michigan (power forward, junior, 6-8, 235)

A versatile athlete who can score underneath and get up and down the court well, Taylor is thought to have unlimited potential.

5. Ron Mercer, Kentucky (small forward, sophomore, 6-7, 215)

Mercer made significant contributions to the national champs as a freshman. He might not be featured in Rick Pitino's system, but his all-around skills will be evident.

6. Jelani McCoy (pictured above), UCLA (center, sophomore, 6-10, 220)

An unreal shot-blocker, McCoy got a healthy amount of minutes at center last season as a freshman. He's probably better suited as a power forward until he develops more of a post game.

7. Raef LaFrentz, Kansas (power forward, junior, 6-11, 220)

LaFrentz gets criticized for being soft, but has great touch for his size and can rebound.

8. Danny Fortson, Cincinnati (power forward, junior, 6-7, 260)

One of the strongest men in the college ranks, Fortson scores points by bullying smaller men underneath. Will he have the strength to do the same in the NBA?

9. Tim Thomas, Villanova (power forward, freshman, 6-10, 235)

No, he didn't turn pro, but likely will soon. Thomas is extremely versatile for his size.

10. Austin Croshere, Providence (small forward, senior, 6-9, 225)

A big man who can shoot and move well, Croshere played well with the under-22 national team.

11. Shea Seals, Tulsa (shooting guard, senior, 6-5, 210)

Seals displayed an affinity for the pro game with a 20-point shooting exhibition for the under-22 team against Dream Team III last summer.

12. J.R. Henderson, UCLA (small forward, junior, 6-9, 215)

Able to score from the post and also adept at nailing the short-range jumper, Henderson has had NBA admirers since he stepped onto the floor at Pauley Pavilion.

13. Adonal Foyle, Colgate (power forward, junior, 6-10, 255)

A good heavy-traffic scorer with great hands, Foyle will see double- and triple-teams all season long.

14. Matt Harpring, Georgia Tech (small forward, junior, 6-7, 226)

An all-around player who can rebound and pass very well, Harpring is on the verge of a breakthrough season.

15. Brevin Knight, Stanford (point guard, senior, 5-10, 170)

A bit small, Knight focuses on the finer points of being a team quarterback—ball handling, penetrating and distributing.

16. Danya Abrams, Boston College (power forward, senior, 6-7, 268)

With excellent strength and a soft touch, Abrams has had great success in the key. He might not have the height for the 4-spot in the NBA.

17. Kenny Thomas, New Mexico (power forward, sophomore, 6-9, 260)

Thomas' freshman numbers got him the attention of NBA scouts. He's big (perhaps too big) and can score inside, rebound and block shots.

18. Jacque Vaughn, Kansas (point guard, senior, 6-1, 195)

In addition to his point-guard skills (quickness, good penetration, solid defense), Vaughn can shoot.

19. Jason Lawson, Villanova (center, senior, 6-11, 240)

He specializes in shot-blocking but is prone to foul trouble. Still, there's a lot of potential.

20. Alexander Koul, George Washington (center, junior, 7-1, 296)

With intriguing size and strength, Koul has caught the attention of scouts. Although not extremely quick, Koul can score, rebound, block shots...and foul.

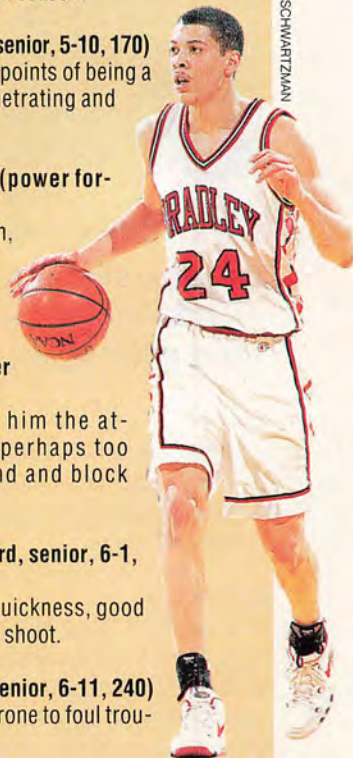
21. Toby Bailey, UCLA (shooting guard, junior, 6-5, 185)

A tremendous athlete who may fit well into the fast-breaking style of the NBA, Bailey can be streaky as a shooter.

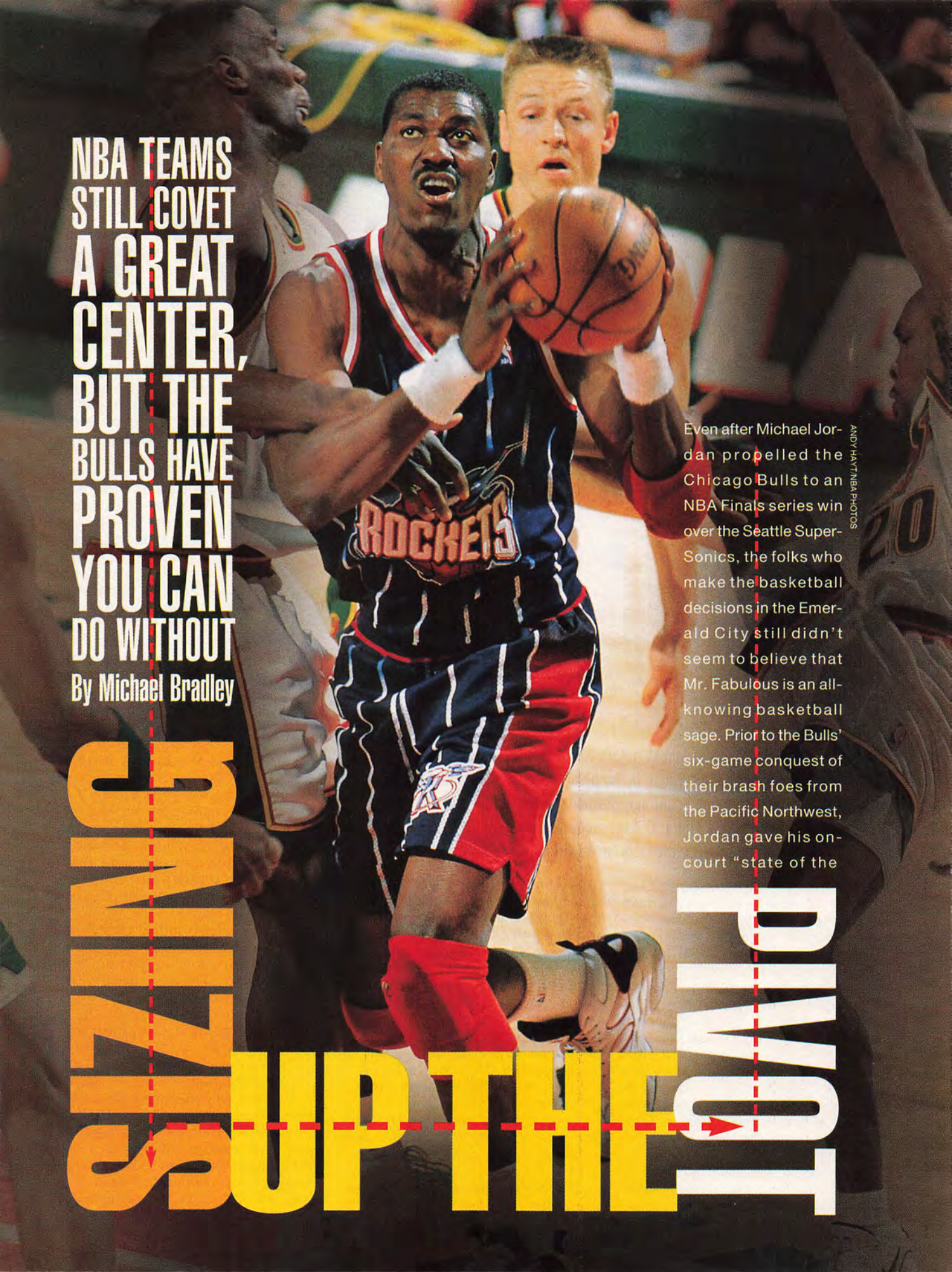
22. Andre Woolridge, Iowa (point guard, senior, 6-0, 190)

A true point guard with great quickness, Woolridge is an expert ball handler, penetrator and passer.

—Paul M. Johnson



BRUCE SCHWARTZMAN



NBA TEAMS
STILL COVET
A GREAT
CENTER,
BUT THE
BULLS HAVE
PROVEN
YOU CAN
DO WITHOUT

By Michael Bradley

Even after Michael Jordan propelled the Chicago Bulls to an NBA Finals series win over the Seattle SuperSonics, the folks who make the basketball decisions in the Emerald City still didn't seem to believe that Mr. Fabulous is an all-knowing basketball sage. Prior to the Bulls' six-game conquest of their brash foes from the Pacific Northwest, Jordan gave his on-court "state of the

ANDY HART/NBA PHOTOS

SIZING UP THE PIVOT



Jim McIlvaine (22), like Jon Koncak before him, is a classic example of how the perceived need for strength in the pivot prompts a team like Seattle to sign an unproven to a huge contract; Hardaway, who guided the Magic to a 17-5 record last year while center O'Neal recovered from injury, now grabs the reins for good in newly perimeter-oriented Orlando.

game" appraisal to the assembled media, complete with an opinion about the right way to win. The Sonics, it seemed, weren't listening.

Professional basketball, Jordan said, is no longer the province of the tall and husky. Championships are won with a collection of interchangeable parts—hardwood handymen, if you will—each capable of doing several things well without being dominant in any one. He gave scribes a history lesson, arguing that no team has won an NBA title with a full-fledged center since the Lakers ruled the league with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Even then, Jordan maintained, the keys to the Los Angeles dynasty were perimeter stalwarts like Magic

Johnson and James Worthy. As for Hakeem Olajuwon, the magnificent center who propelled Houston to a pair of championships in the dark days of a Jordan-less NBA, forget it. He's a 7-foot small forward, Jordan said, with the same kind of multifaceted game as players six inches shorter. What was once a league ruled by Goliaths like George Mikan, Bill Russell, Wilt Chamberlain and Abdul-Jabbar had turned into a game for decathletes.

"I've always believed that the game has evolved to where the most versatile players are the most dominant in this game," Jordan said.

It wasn't a bad argument, especially after the Bulls won yet another

NBA crown without a dominant center. Jordan, Scottie Pippen and Dennis Rodman formed the mix-and-match nucleus, around which a collection of supporting parts

orbited. Even the Sonics, who staged a stronger-than-expected challenge in the finals, were without substance in the middle. It appeared Jordan's logic was irrefutable. NBA teams would stage a run on wing guards and forwards, and the big guys would go hungry. For a month or so, it appeared as if the end to the post-vs.-perimeter debate was at hand. Jordan and the Bulls had struck a mortal blow for better winning through versatility.

Then came the free-agent auction. While Orlando and Los Angeles bid the GNPs of third-world nations for Shaquille O'Neal, Seattle also looked to its middle. The Sonics stunned many by signing 7-1 Washington backup pivot Jim McIlvaine, a man with two years of experience and a lifetime scoring average of 2.1, to a seven-year, \$35 million contract.

By making McIlvaine this year's version of Jon Koncak—giant contract, no proven record—the Sonics offered an expensive rebuttal to Jordan's argument. They had company. This season, thanks to the arrivals of McIlvaine in Seattle and O'Neal in L.A., the NBA's Pacific Division—once the purest example of free-form basketball on the planet—now resembles the Cold War, with everybody trying to find the biggest weapons around. Even Golden State, which threatened to enter a 6-6-and-under league under

former coach Don Nelson, drafted North Carolina State center Todd Fuller.

"Everyone would like to have a [dominant center]," Seattle president and GM Wally Walker says. "If you don't have one, you do what you have to in order to compete. You need some kind of offensive threat who can post up, draw the double-team and pass the ball out to the perimeter."

Although Seattle has three such players in forwards Shawn Kemp and Detlef Schrempf and point man Gary Payton, they couldn't say no when a big man became available.

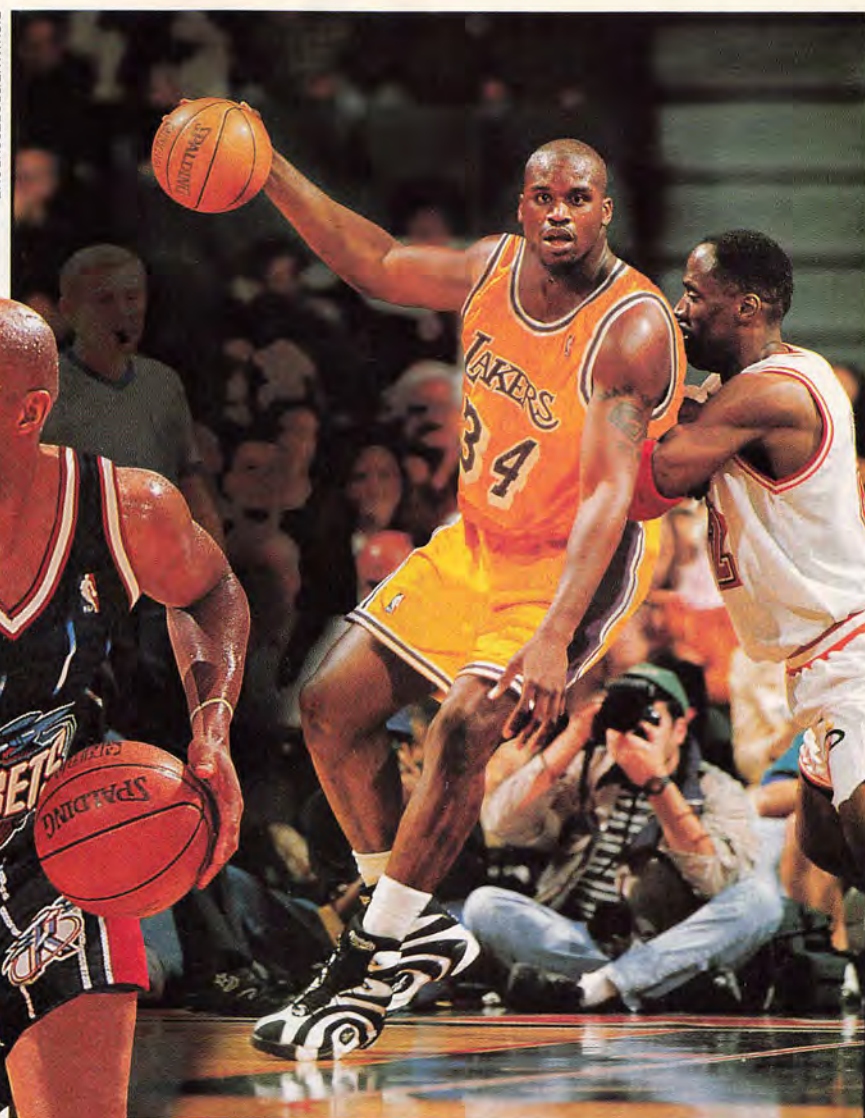
Center Bill Russell may have retired nearly three decades ago, but his "11 rings, 10 fingers" mantra still resonates. Despite compelling evidence to the contrary, NBA execs believe bigger is better. It's an interesting paradox. If Jordan is right, and he seems to be in everything but his Olajuwon assertion, the GMs are ignoring proven methods of success in the hunt for quality centers.

"Great centers come along once every 10 years," says Orlando GM Pat Williams, who bid farewell to O'Neal last summer. "They have never been that abundant to begin with, and now that there are 29 teams, it's even tougher."

Though it has been difficult to consider a team that made it to the NBA Finals two seasons ago an expansion franchise, Williams is asking central Florida fans to regard the Magic as a game, albeit over-matched first-year aggregation. "It's almost going to be like the early days, when we were scuffling and scrapping to win games," Williams says.

Yes, Shaq is gone, and now Orlando must make the transition from

RICH KANE/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED



TOM DIPACE

Jordan may question the significance of the big man, but the Lakers clearly don't, having emptied their wallets to sign O'Neal (above); Jordan instead stresses the need for versatility, and Barkley in Houston makes the Rockets highly interchangeable.

an inside-out team to one that starts (and could finish) everything on the perimeter. "We're changing from a low-post team where the center handled the ball every play to a situation where the center might not see it at all on some

plays," Williams says.

The Magic is hoping the first two months of last season, when it raced to a 17-5 record while O'Neal recovered from a broken thumb, was a harbinger for success this year. Or-

lando will rely on guards Penny Hardaway and Nick Anderson and forwards Dennis Scott and Horace Grant to replicate the play of the Bulls' Big Three, while new pivot Felton Spencer contributes here and there when defenses forget about him. It's not a bad model, and it could be good news for Spencer, the plodding Utah castaway who has twice the insulation he had while with the Jazz (John Stockton and Karl Malone).

"Bill Wennington was a casualty before he came to the Bulls," notes New Jersey Nets GM John Nash. "Luc Longley was a major disappointment in Minnesota. Stacey King was an effective player in Chicago, but he hasn't done much since leaving. Pivots in Chicago

tend to look better than in previous stops or in their next stops because defenses pay so much attention to Michael and Scottie."

Orlando may get away with it, but only if Hardaway continues his transformation into a full-fledged leading man, capable of dominating games from the backcourt like Jordan. Anderson and Scott, meanwhile, must elevate and diversify their games, while Grant needs to increase his rebounding considerably. None of that is guaranteed. "What happened for two months last year is fine, but that does not a season make," Williams says. And that's why the Bulls are so unique. Jordan, Pippen and Rodman may just be the best in the world at their respective positions. With this trio, who needs a dominant center?

Houston sure does. Jordan may argue that Olajuwon is a small forward in pivot's clothing, and that may be somewhat true offensively, given the 7-footer's stunning arsenal of moves. But Olajuwon is also the NBA's all-time shot-blocking leader and a fearsome defender. "What we always used to tell new players was that if they get beat on defense, don't worry, because Olajuwon will be there; he always is," says Carroll Dawson, who spent 16 years as a Rockets assistant coach before becoming the team's executive VP of basketball.

Few teams have the luxury of having an Olajuwon (or David Robinson or Patrick Ewing) to clean up defensive breakdowns by other players, and that has contributed greatly to the type of defense played in the league. Dawson reports that the growing sophistication of defenses is the biggest change he's seen in the past two decades. The double-teaming, rotating configurations can create enough havoc in 24 seconds to stunt even the mightiest scoring machine. Cleveland played all of last year with aging power forward Michael Cage in the middle, yet still led the NBA in scoring defense. "You have to have versatility to score now," Dawson says.

The Rockets should have that this season. The addition of forward Charles Barkley to a roster that includes Olajuwon and guard Clyde Drexler should propel them back into the championship hunt. It also provides an interesting scenario in the post-vs.-perimeter argument. Now Houston has a strong presence in the middle and an expanded outside attack. It'll be interesting to see how it all fits together. One thing is



ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBA PHOTOS

"The game has evolved to where the most versatile players are the most dominant in this game," says Jordan, whose Bulls, without an accomplished big man, have won four championships in the '90s—proof that a go-to center is no longer needed?

certain, the Rockets will be even more versatile now than when they won back-to-back titles.

The Bulls' four titles in the last six years demonstrates that Jordan does know what he's talking about. But Chicago could win the next five championships and NBA GMs would still salivate over a big man. Want proof? Just wait a couple seasons until Washington's Gheorghe Muresan becomes a free agent. The 7-7 Romanian is hardly a Euro-Cham-

berlain, but he's demonstrated the ability to produce in the middle.

"He'll be considered one of the elite centers," Nash says. "Teams take gambles on big people. Look at Jim McIlvaine. Seattle is putting its money on his *potential*."

And several teams will have no trouble speculating on Muresan. The bidding should start at about \$7 million a year.

Sorry, Michael, but the NBA still loves the big man. ★



Montreal's GOALIE PATRICK ROY HAS SEALED THE FATES OF TWO NHL FRANCHISES/BY BARRY M. BLOOM

Avalanche

There is no doubt that America has appropriated Canada's national sport. The Stanley Cup now sits in Denver, and Winnipeg has moved to Phoenix, for heaven's sake. A Montreal Canadien no more, French Canadian treasure Patrick Roy etched his name on the Cup as a member of the erstwhile Quebec Nordiques—now the Colorado Avalanche.

"Every athlete has pride. When you have a chance to win with the Montreal Canadiens, it's something you'll always be proud of," says Roy, the Conn Smythe Trophy winner and MVP of Montreal's last two Cup champions, in

1986 and '93. "The only thing I regret in Montreal is the way it ended. I truly believe I deserved a better end than what happened."

At the Forum last March, ancient Habs players actually passed a flaming torch from hand to hand in a closing ceremony that didn't leave a dry eye in the house. But the final sad Forum chapter actually was closed the previous December when the Detroit Red Wings handed the *Bleu, Blanc and Rouge* a nasty 11-1 pasting on the same ice where Rocket Richard, Guy Lafleur and Jean Beliveau said their goodbyes months later.

Nine goals in the hole and boos ringing down from the ancient rafters like cold winter sleet, new coach Mario Tremblay finally yanked Roy from the game. A native of Quebec City, Roy longed for the good old days—a time when Canadiens management invested its money in the team and Roy was treated with respect.

In a fit of rage, Roy skated over to the bench and spotted club president Ronald Corey sitting in his usual seat just above the ice. Glaring first at Tremblay, Roy spat out in French what he later translated for the press in his deliciously fractured English: "I will never play for

"Montreal did me a big favor. They knew I wanted to play in Denver. I wanted to play for a team that had a chance to win the Stanley Cup."—Roy

the Canadiens again." Four days later, Roy was sent to the Avalanche in a deal that sealed the rising and falling fates of two franchises.

Roy became the final piece of a powerful roster that Avalanche general manager Pierre Lacroix began to assemble years earlier. By the end of the '96 postseason, Roy had increased his playoff total to 86 victories, crowned by a triple-overtime shutout performance against Florida in the Cup finale.

"When you get traded like that, you want to show your new fans and your new team that they made the right move," Roy says. "On the other side, you want to show your old team you're still capable of winning big games."

For the Canadiens, the Roy debacle marked a final fall from grace. After missing the playoffs in '95 for the first time in 25 years, the Canadiens opened last season in a funk. Coach Jacques Demers and general manag-

er Serge Savard were fired, replaced by Tremblay and Rejean Houle, respectively. Last March, the new hierarchy used the closing of the old Forum and opening of the new Molson Centre as a clubhouse cry to rally a languid Montreal team back into the playoffs. It was terrific closure and wonderful theater, but the Canadiens had little control of how the script would conclude.

Blame it on the young players or blame it on the Forum mystique. The New York Rangers, who were dreadful on that March opening night in the Keg, discovered that playing in Montreal is not quite as harrowing as it used to be. Heading into the '96 playoffs, the Rangers had won only once there in 21 games. Last spring, the Rangers won all three playoff games in the Keg, taking the series in six games.

"Everyone said the Rangers couldn't win in Montreal," Rangers defenseman Ulf Samuelsson said after the series. "But this is not the Forum, this is a new building. So it is the same for both teams."

Meanwhile, Roy was revitalized. Few fans remember that the Nordiques finished with the best record in the East two seasons ago only to be knocked out in the first round of the playoffs by the eighth-seeded

Rangers. But new ownership in Colorado didn't remain complacent in one of the NHL's budding markets. The three deals that solidified the Avalanche's Cup effort came in rapid succession. Claude Lemieux, MVP of the 1995 playoffs and a former Canadian, was obtained from New Jersey in a three-way deal that sent Wendel Clark to the New York Islanders. Owen Nolan went to San Jose for young defenseman Sandis Ozolinsh. And Roy was obtained from Montreal in a deal that sent backup goalie Jocelyn Thibault, among others, to the Canadiens.

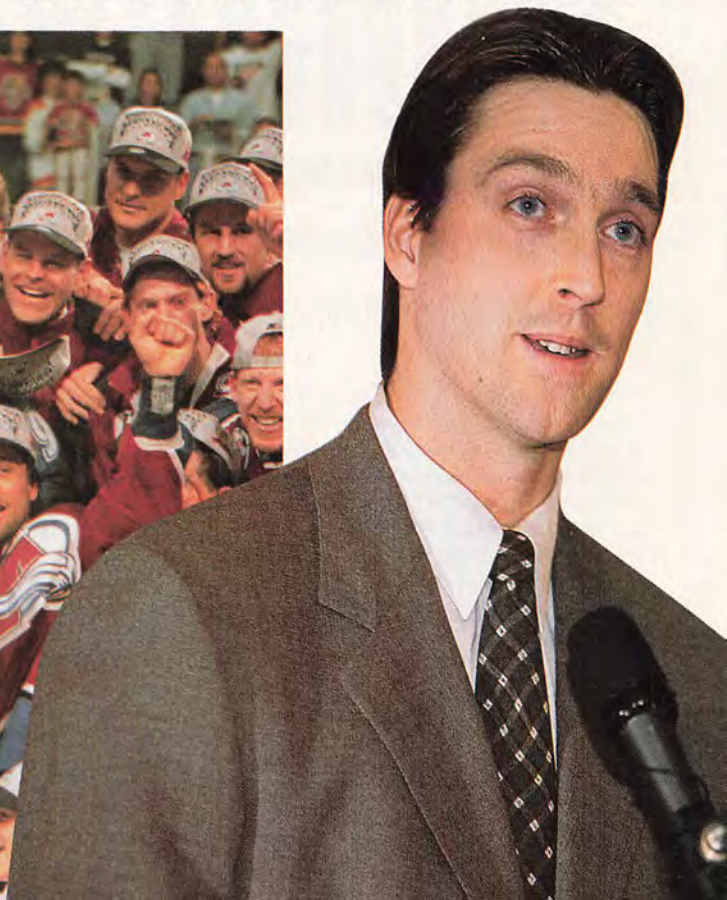
By the time Colorado swept Florida in the finals, it was evident the Roy deal had paid sweet dividends. In a dramatic Game 4 at Miami Arena, Roy and Panthers goalie John Vanbiesbrouck combined to stop 118 shots in 104 minutes of play before Uwe Krupp's shot went through Vanbiesbrouck's pads to end the game at 1:06 a.m. Roy stopped 63 shots in the 1-0 victory, one of the greatest Stanley Cup performances ever.

"This was the first time I was involved in a trade," Roy says. "Sometimes you don't know how to react. But the way I feel about it now is that I just want to thank the people in Montreal

Roy (right) vowed to "never play for the Canadiens again" after an ugly incident on Forum ice; happier days were ahead for Roy, who led the Avalanche to the Cup.

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"We need a good hockey team in Montreal. Everybody knows that. But there's no magic formula."—Ronald Corey, Canadiens president

who supported me since that incident happened, the real fans of Patrick Roy. They're the ones I think about today. I don't want to jab anybody in Montreal. It's all over. It's not my problem what happens in Montreal now."

That said, Roy thinks Montreal management baited him into the trade. "It was part of their plan," he says. "They would have traded me sooner or later. They just used those circumstances to make the trade. It was obvious at that point that both parties needed to go in a different direction."

The deal evidently was all about money. The Canadiens, in trying to reduce their payroll, have gone to a kiddy corps, with only three players remaining from the team that beat the Los Angeles Kings for the '93 Cup—Benoit Brunet, Patrice Brisebois and Vincent Damphousse, who last March scored the first goal ever in the Keg.

Corey admitted he was counting pennies on the eve of the mournful farewell to the Forum, a building that was remodeled in 1969 and was still a polished jewel by any comparison. The Canadiens turned a tidy \$3-4 million profit each season in the Forum, Corey says. The brewery went into serious debt to finance the new glass-and-steel

20,000-seat structure replete with the requisite luxury boxes. The project seemed like a good one at the time of conception, but may eventually prove foolhardy in a Montreal economy stung by separatist politics and a Canadian dollar worth 30 percent less than the U.S. dollar.

Increased revenue generated by the new building will go toward paying that debt, not into the team, Corey says. To prove his point, the Canadiens made only one significant move during the off-season, trading defenseman Lyle Odelein to New Jersey for right wing Stephane Richer, who was banished once before by the Canadiens for not performing under pressure.

In the days before the amateur draft, the Canadiens snapped up the best French Canadian prospects to extend their marvelous dominance. In another era, a player like Mario Lemieux, born and raised in Montreal, would have played for the Habs, not the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Without that edge, the Canadiens have won just two Cups since a run of four ended in '79. Undoubtedly, they never again will dominate like in the old days. If the rabid hockey fans of Montreal turn off, the new building could be a

huge financial bust.

"Don't worry," Corey says. "The project will be very good if we are very successful. We can't sit on our laurels. We need a good hockey team in Montreal. Everybody knows that. But there's no magic formula."

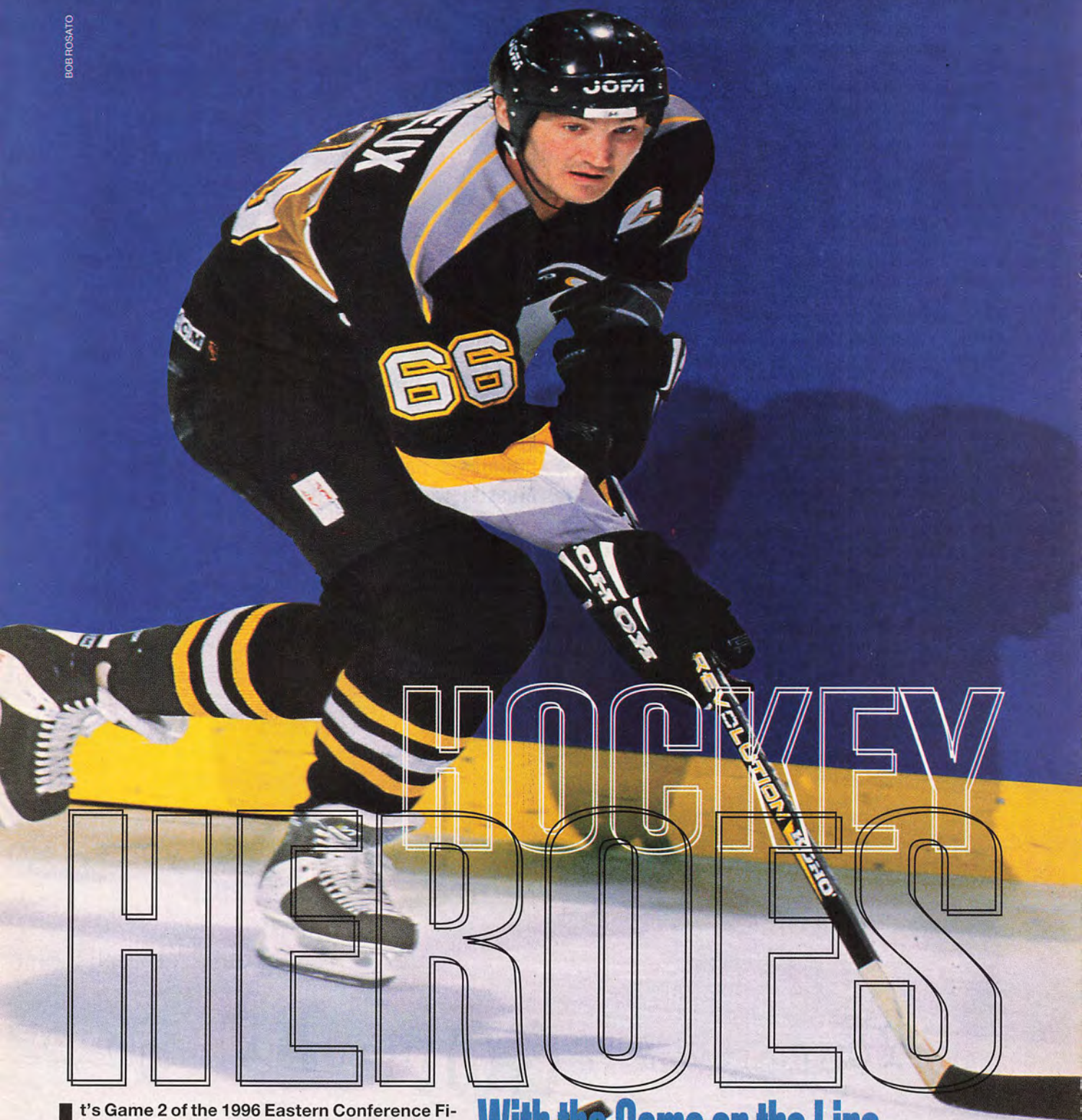
In Colorado, Avalanche management has a new arena on the drawing board and plenty of money to keep the right formula on ice. The nucleus of the championship team is also young: Sakic is 27, Ozolinsh is 24, Peter Forsberg is 23. In the off-season, Lacroix thanked Roy, an old-timer at 31, by signing him to a new contract. Denver is where Roy longs to call home for the remainder of his career. Now Roy thanks the Canadiens.

"Montreal did me a big favor," Roy says. "They knew I wanted to play in Denver. I wanted to play for a team that had a chance to win the Stanley Cup. That's always been my goal, my reason for playing in the NHL. I just don't want to make the playoffs, I want to win the Cup." ★

Says Roy: "You want to show your old team you're still capable of winning big games." He did.

R. LABERGE/BRUCE BENNETT STUDIOS





It's Game 2 of the 1996 Eastern Conference Finals between the Pittsburgh Penguins and Florida Panthers, and a stomach virus has rendered Mario Lemieux weak, dizzy and dehydrated. Having taken fluids intravenously during the first intermission, he is finally regaining his strength.

Lemieux returns to the Pittsburgh bench, greeted by a rousing ovation from the 17,000 faithful. But how's his stomach? Lemieux responds

**With the Game on the Line,
These NHL Superstars Always
Come Through/By Bryan Ethier**

by scoring the game-winning goal and adding an assist. Final score: Pittsburgh 3, Florida 2.

Lemieux is not the only NHL superstar who can dictate the outcome of a game even when barely able to retain fluids; there are others—the league's franchise players, the clutch scorers, the icons: Eric Lindros, Mark Messier, Jaromir Jagr and Joe Sakic.

"You don't find out what a player's like during the good times," says Barry Melrose, ESPN's hockey analyst and a former head coach for the Los Angeles Kings. "You find out what a player's like during the bad times; that's what superstars are."

In Lemieux's case, the good times have been grand: two Stanley Cup rings (1991, '92), five scoring titles and three Hart Trophies.

Then there's the bad side. Lemieux has had two back operations and missed 146 games due to back-related problems. In 1993, he was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease, a form of cancer that attacks the lymph nodes. He sat out the entire 1994-95 season, resting his back and recuperating from the ravaging effects of radiation treatment.

With his cancer in remission, Super Mario returned to the Pens last year and

Most Potent with the Puck

1. Mario Lemieux, Pittsburgh
2. Eric Lindros, Philadelphia
3. Jaromir Jagr, Pittsburgh
4. Joe Sakic, Colorado
5. Mark Messier, N.Y. Rangers
6. Peter Forsberg, Colorado
7. Paul Kariya, Anaheim
8. Alexander Mogilny, Vancouver
9. Sergei Fedorov, Detroit
10. Wayne Gretzky, N.Y. Rangers

was named the league's MVP. "I thought it was one of the great comebacks in the history of any sport," says Pittsburgh head coach Ed Johnston.

But Lemieux's season was not without new challenges. On March 24, Lemieux's wife, Nathalie, gave birth to the couple's first son, Austin, born three months premature. In Lemieux's next game, he scored five goals and added two assists as the Pens beat St. Louis. Ah, the miracle of birth.



JIM MESSIA/BRUCE BENNETT STUDIOS



From left: Lindros, with the physical presence to intimidate; Sakic, last year's playoff MVP; and Messier, who elevates the games of his teammates.

While Lemieux leaves goaltenders dribbling, teammate Jaromir Jagr leaves defensemen clueless. At age 24, the 6-2, 216-pound right winger is football's Jim Brown and Gale Sayers in one unstoppable package. With a reach that seems to extend

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Your friends want
Your ^{coach} wants you to GO play Ball at the junior
Your high school guidance

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SCOTT LEVY/BRUCE BENNETT STUDIOS

from goal line to goal line, Jagr controls the puck like an impish sixth grader playing keep-away from the third-grade pip-squeaks.

During Lemieux's absence in the abbreviated 1994-95 season, Jagr blossomed into the team's go-to guy. He recorded 32 goals and 38 assists to capture his first NHL scoring title. Last

year, Jagr eclipsed his previous highs by netting 62 goals and 87 assists. He broke Mike Bossy's single-season records for points and assists for a right winger.

"Prior to my becoming head coach, Jaromir sometimes couldn't clearly understand what you were talking about," Johnston explains. "Now he's got full control of the language. He's the first one on the ice and the last one off."

While Jagr is beginning to emerge from

Lemieux's shadow, Philadelphia Flyers center Eric Lindros has the physical presence to intimidate opponents around the NHL. Last year, as one of the NHL's youngest captains, he led the team in scoring with 47 goals and 68 assists, sixth-best in the NHL. During his four seasons, the Flyers are 126-88-31 with Lindros in the lineup, 18-28-7 without him.

"Eric is different because he has the physical presence and ability to intimidate, to hurt you, to change his game without even touching the puck," says Flyers head coach Terry Murray.

Lindros also makes his teammates better. Take Legion of Doom linemate John LeClair, an underutilized checking forward before the Montreal Canadiens traded him to Philly on Feb. 9, 1995. Today, LeClair has blossomed into an All-Star power forward.

"Great players have the responsibility to make the rest of the players on the team better," Murray says, "and I think that responsibility leads them to perform to the best of their ability day in and day out."

New York Rangers star center Mark Messier elevates his teammates' games by putting his neck on the line during each and every shift. "There's a time to scold a guy, a time when you have to con a guy," says Rangers coach Colin Campbell. "The coach can tell a play-

er, 'I care,' but the player would think it's a sell job. Mark shows the players he cares."

Nobody questions Messier's authority: 18-plus seasons, six rings, two Hart Trophies, 13 All-Star games and 1,468 points going into the year, fifth-most in NHL history.

In Gotham, Messier will always be remembered for guaranteeing a Rangers win in Game 6 of the 1994 Eastern Conference Finals. The New Jersey Devils were one period away from advancing to the Stanley Cup Finals when Messier scored three goals to lead the Blueshirts to victory. Eight games later, the Rangers drank from the Cup for the first time in 54 years.

Last year, the Colorado Avalanche celebrated its first Stanley Cup ever, thanks in part to a career playoff series from center Joe Sakic. After recording 51 goals and 69 assists in the regular season, Sakic was named playoff MVP by knocking home 18 goals and 16 assists. More importantly, six of those goals were game-winners.

"In Joe's case, playing in anonymity was his adversity," explains Colorado head coach Marc Crawford. "I think he looked around last year and saw that we had a much deeper team. I think he thought he had to be on top of his game and perform at a high level."

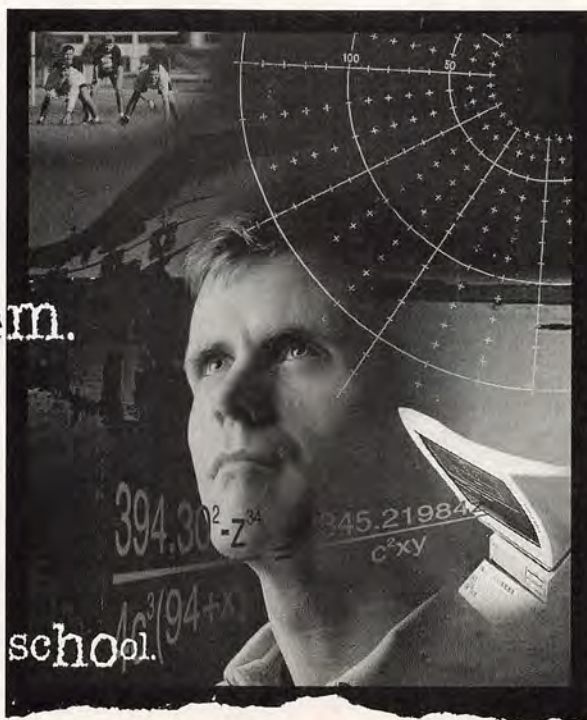
Like his counterparts, Sakic came face-to-face with his personal demon. He just smiled and skated off into hockey history. ★

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you to go Hang out with them.

college he went to.

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sport quiz

BRUCE L. SCHWARTZMAN



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- 1** Neil O'Donnell (pictured) is one of three quarterbacks to have guided the Pittsburgh Steelers to an AFC championship game. Name the others.
- 2** Name the only member of the Washington Redskins who has remained with the team since Super Bowl XVIII (Redskins vs. Raiders).

- 3** Tight end Jay Novacek was drafted by which NFL team?
A. Cowboys B. Cardinals
C. Raiders D. Bills
- 4** Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder Wayne Kirby has both a brother and a cousin who play in the NFL. Name them.
- 5** Who was the last NFL team to be shut out in a conference championship game?
A. Rams B. Redskins
C. Raiders D. Colts
- 6** Name the last NBA head coach to guide the Washington Bullets to a record above .500.
- 7** Which NBA player led the L.A. Lakers in rebounds last season?
A. Cedric Ceballos B. Elden Campbell
C. Vlade Divac D. Eddie Jones
- 8** Name the last NBA rookie to score 2,000 points in a season.
- 9** Forward Billy Owens played for two NBA teams last season. Name them.

- 10** True or false: No member of the Indiana Pacers played in an NBA All-Star game during the 1980s.
- 11** Which Division 1-A college football team holds the record for most points scored in a game?
A. Notre Dame B. Northwestern
C. USC D. Wyoming
- 12** Cleveland Indians outfielder Kenny Lofton played basketball for which university?
A. UCLA B. Arizona
C. Syracuse D. Maryland
- 13** Whom did Marvin Hagler defeat to win the world middleweight title?
A. Thomas Hearn B. Vito Antuofermo
C. Alan Minter D. Mustafa Hamsho
—William Ladson

STUMPER Who is the only player to be named AL Rookie of the Year and go on to hit 500 career home runs?

DEC. '96 STUMPER ANSWER Patrick Roy ("Name the last NHL rookie to win the Stanley Cup Finals MVP.")

THIS MONTH'S QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Terry Bradshaw and Mark Malone 2. Darrell Green 3. B. Terry Kirby and Chris Slade 4. B. Kevin Loughery (1986-87) 5. C. Michael Jordan 6. Miami and Sacramento 7. True 8. True 9. True 10. True 11. D (103) 12. B 13. C



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HOTSHOT

George Jones

To San Diego State running back George Jones, football as a way out of tough surroundings isn't a modern-day sports cliché—it's real. Reared on the mean streets of the Eastside section of Greenville, S.C., Jones watched the NFL on television as a kid and knew he had found the ticket.

"I started setting my goals and expected to get there," says the densely muscled, 5-9, 210-pound Jones, who guesses that without football he wouldn't have gone to college and probably would be laboring at a textile mill.

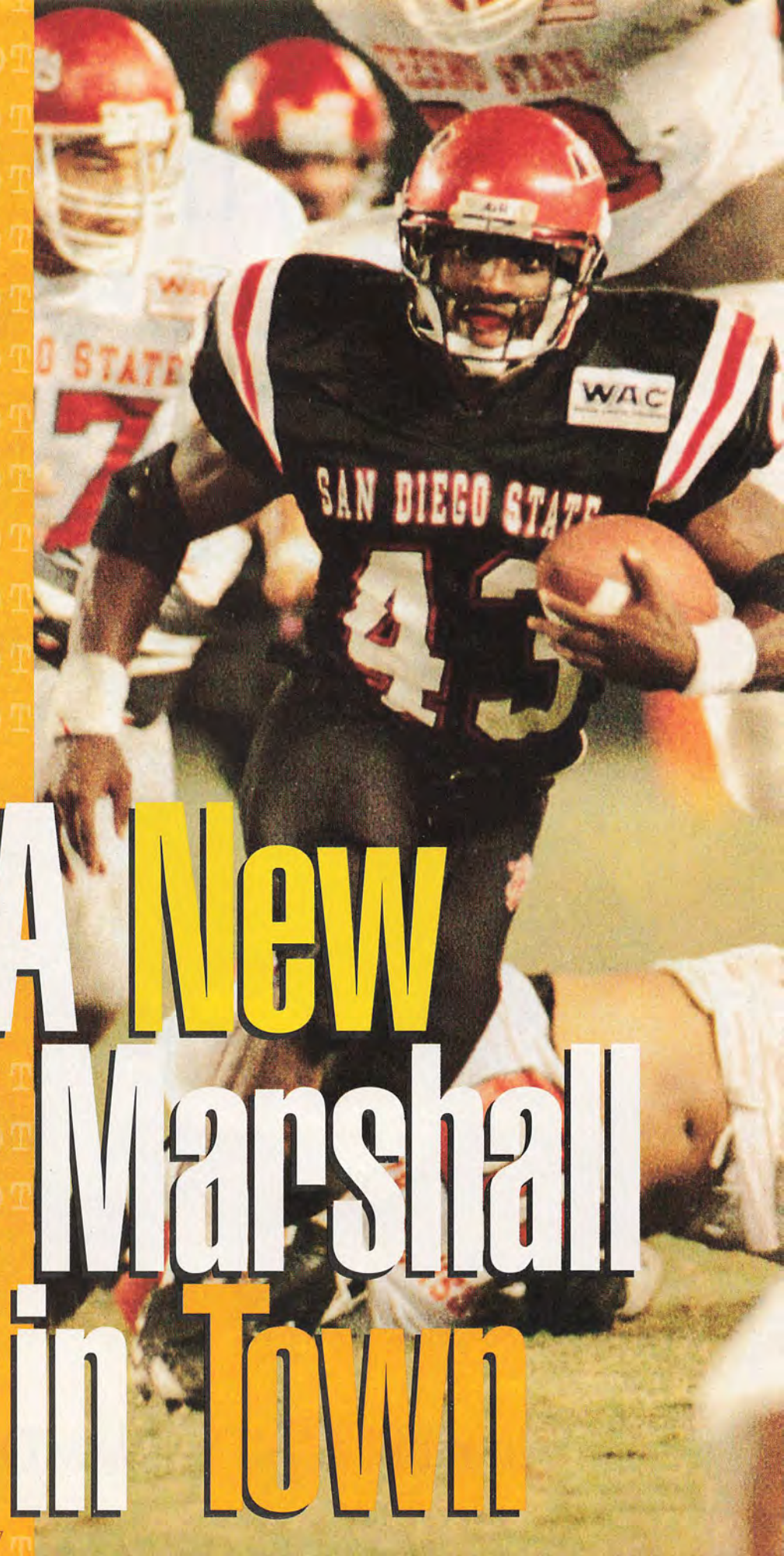
At each stage of the journey that has taken him from those oppressive streets to the auspicious openness of San Diego, he's run that additional sprint and pushed out that extra set in the weight room, labor more suited to Jones.

"I had nothing to fall back on," says Jones. "So I had no choice." No choice because, for all intents and purposes, Jones had no family. Spending nights and eating meals on a rotation of neighborhood friends' homes, he was self-sufficient at far too young an age. It is a topic that Jones has yet to openly discuss and won't, until he's ready.

Coming to San Diego State from Bakersfield Junior College, Jones—despite a national-record 34 touchdowns—was a relative unknown. The Aztecs' preseason guide devoted three paragraphs to the transfer running back, but a full page to another Southerner-turned-San Diegan, Marshall Faulk. Featured as the lone back in the same single-back offense in which the Indianapolis Colts star had been showcased, Jones shattered Faulk's school and WAC rushing marks, piling up 1,842 yards; among the significant numbers were three games of 200 or more yards, 23 TDs and a six-yards-per-carry average.

An NCAA-imposed four-game suspension cost him big rushing numbers this season, but Jones has used the second half to bolster his NFL credentials and provide further ammunition for the inevitable comparison to Faulk.

"I feel if I can break his records, then I'm just as good as he is," Jones boasts. "If he got as far as he has, there's no telling what I'm going to do." —Paul M. Johnson



A New Marshall in Town

VETERAN'S DAY

RACING LEGEND A.J. FOYT
PASSES THE TORCH
BY RICK VOEGELIN

A.J. Foyt's instructions to driver Scott Sharp in the last lap of a 200-mile Indy car race at New Hampshire International Speedway were predictably forceful and profane: "Gas that bitch!" he ordered his young charge.

Sharp did as he was told, and shortly thereafter added another notch to A.J.'s remarkable record by scoring the Texan's first Indy car victory in 15 years. Foyt positively basked in the winner's circle—not as a celebrated driver, but as a successful car owner.

In the broad landscape of American auto racing, Anthony Joseph Foyt Jr.—"A.J." for short—stands as one of the few true landmarks. The indomitable Foyt has earned his place in motorsports history as the only man to win the Indy 500, the 24 Hours of Le Mans and the Daytona 500. Sharp's triumph in a Foyt-owned Indy car was another milestone in a remarkable career.

Foyt and Sharp are truly the odd couple of Indy car racing. Foyt, 61, is brash and blunt, a self-made millionaire racer/businessman who found fame and fortune on the gritty dirt tracks and deadly bullrings that once comprised the championship circuit. Sharp, 28, is a well-heeled Connecticut Yankee, a former sports car champion with a college degree in finance and a preference for penny loafers over cowboy boots.

Although Foyt seems an unlikely candidate for the role of Zen master, he has nevertheless become Sharp's mentor in the arcane art of Indy car racing. He coached Sharp to a co-championship in the Indy Racing League's abbreviated first season, and then masterminded Sharp's first win in an open-wheel race car.

"We hit it off immediately," Sharp recalls. "He understood how I liked to drive the car and did a good job of setting it up. It's an honor to drive for him, but it's an even bigger honor to win a race for him."

Sharp's breakthrough Indy car victory indeed bore Foyt's unmistakable stamp.

Photogenic Tony Stewart, the leading candidate for stardom in the fledgling Indy Racing League series, had streaked to a seemingly insurmountable two-lap lead—and then an electrical glitch left his race car sitting silently in the pits. Sharp pounced on his rival's misfortune, finishing 20 seconds ahead of runner-up Buzz Calkins, the driver with whom he shared the IRL championship.

"That's how I've won most of the races in my career," Foyt explains. "I always came from the back."



In an age of media-slick marketers, Foyt remains an irrepressible throwback to auto racing's rough-and-tumble early days. He is a hands-on car owner who's not afraid to pick up a wrench and show a mechanic just how he thinks a job should be done. He is sometimes abrasive, occasionally arrogant and always intolerant of fools—whether they are fellow car owners, officials or journalists.

"Hell, I've been a car owner all my life," Foyt lectured a roomful of reporters. "The only difference is that I'm not driving. I don't care if you get to Victory Lane one time or a thousand times, it's great. I don't care if it's racing, golf or football, there ain't but one spot to be, and that's No. 1."

Clearly the years have not mellowed Foyt. He has been an outspoken ally of Tony George, IRL founder and owner of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, in George's ongoing rivalry with the well-established CART IndyCar organization for the hearts and minds of open-wheel racing fans.

"The guys who say they made the Indianapolis 500 what it is are full of s---t," says Foyt, the first four-time Indy winner. "Indianapolis made them; the Indy 500 made me. We need to get back to racing on ovals instead of racing on city streets."

Motorsports has indeed changed dramatically since A.J. first climbed into an Indy car in 1957. Only time and television ratings will reveal whether today's fans share Foyt's abiding love for the ovals that have made him an authentic American hero. ★





GOLFING

TRENDS

NOTES FROM THE TOUR

Shaq's Golf Stroke Takes a Turn for the West/

By Ed Kiersh

Shaq's Big Loss—Spending more time on putting than his free-throw shooting, miniature-golf fanatic Shaquille O'Neal built a nine-hole putting course at his posh Isleworth home in Orlando, Fla., and was set to have neighbor (and Orlando Magic fan) Mark O'Meara help him with his stroke. But having been seduced by the L.A. Lakers' big bucks and with the prospects of playing golf with the likes of Jack Nicholson, O'Neal will not be getting any tips from O'Meara, who questions whether Shaq has that championship touch. "A lot of people in Orlando loved him but still had questions about his free-throw shooting and wondered if his heart was ever really devoted to playing here," says O'Meara, who's long been friendly with hockey great Wayne Gretzky and major-leaguer Ken Griffey Jr. "Shaq wants to increase his marketability for movies, and Los Angeles is obviously a much larger market than Orlando, so to hell with loyalty! Now my favorite player is Penny Hardaway. He has all the moves and could well become another Michael Jordan."

Growing Pains—No wonder Phil Mickelson hasn't won a major this year. This young gun has been tormented, unhappy with the tie-dyed, stonewashed Fairway Blues shirts he's been wearing the past four years. Feeling this clothing was too young-looking and not befitting of his rising status as a PGA Tour force, he's severed his relationship with the LaMode sportswear company to pursue a clothing agreement (perhaps with Ashworth or Bobby Jones) that will mean threads with a more "elegant, sophisticated" look. Mickelson hopes to one day have his own clothing collection like a Payne Stewart or Greg Norman. But says LaMode marketing exec Chris Hahn: "Phil is certainly talented and developing the charisma to warrant his own clothing line, but he's not there yet."

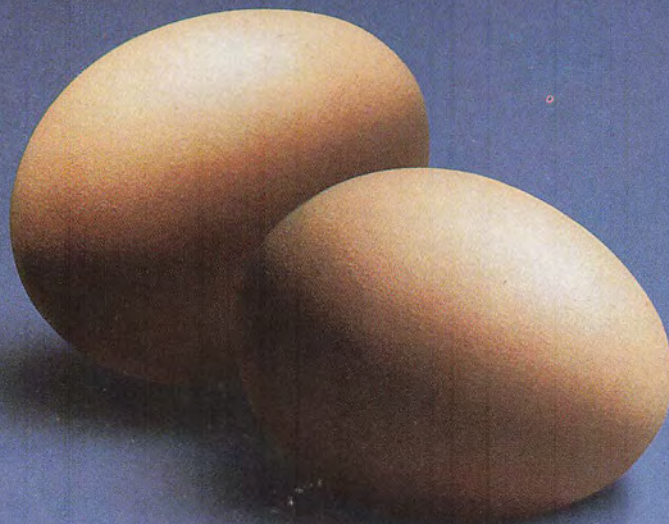
Flying High—Once it was speeding off into the wild blue yonder with a few brewskis. But now John Daly is showing interest in following the lead of a Palmer, Norman or Nicklaus by purchasing a plane. Big John can afford—and apparently needs—a Lear jet. Besides promoting the fast-selling Wilson Invex driver, he's hurtling from one enterprise to another,

launching an interactive CD-Rom game, and preparing to debut an Internet web site. His agent, John Mascatello, says: "With John having all these new corporate responsibilities, he can't rely anymore on commercial air travel. He's a major international franchise now, and that demands his getting around quickly, without bothering to refuel....Daly is unique. His fan base is new breed, not country club." Yet with Daly flying so high, the question begs asking: Will John be able to keep his feet on the ground?

Dirty Harry Pulls the Trigger—Actor and former Carmel, Calif., mayor Clint Eastwood has decided to go for more gold by developing a private golf course (for his "select" friends) and a gated housing community near fabled Pebble Beach on the Monterey Peninsula. For a few dollars more, or a mere \$1.5 million for a housing lot, the well-heeled will enjoy vistas overlooking the Pacific and play this linksland-styled course. An avid golfer and frequent participant in the annual AT&T Pebble Beach event, Eastwood will be "devoting more time to his game" once this \$10-15 million layout is completed, in 1998 or '99.



HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR EGGS?





GOLFING TRENDS

Sam Snead on the rhythmic swing

Too many guys do the jerk, try to beat the hell out of a ball and swing way too fast. That only means trouble—hitting under the ball, hooking, slicing, all kinds of doggone things. But I tell people, “Swing the club back slowly, like you’re doing a waltz—da, da, da, da—and pull the club down, letting your left hand initiate the action.”

The first step to slowing down, to putting some musical rhythm into your swing and not just muscling everything, is to take a relaxed grip. Don’t hold that club like you’re squeezing a chicken to death. This only leads to tense arms, and you become what’s called “a chopper.”

So No. 1 is the soft grip. I don’t want the blood pouring into your hands. The wrists have to have elas-

ticity, and so that softer grip gives you more clubhead speed. The hands stay around the club. The fingers don’t come apart.

Secondly, bad players have too wide a stance, even for a chip shot. The feet have to be closer together, which cuts down on the swaying. With too wide a stance,

the top part of the body starts to move, and a golfer never wants that—to look like a shaking tree. So your feet should never be any wider than your shoulders.

Lastly, just swing back slowly, count to yourself, hear that waltz music, do anything that relaxes you. If you jerk the club back fast, chances are your swing will be short. You’ll lose your balance and won’t get much club speed. Don’t throw the club back



on the downswing. Just pull down, letting the last two fingers of the left hand initiate the downswing.

These fingers start the weight shift to your left side. Just as a baseball player can’t hit

a ball off his right foot, neither can a golfer. Swing the club back slowly, stop at the top of the swing, and pull the club down with your left hand with elastic wrists. Remember, don’t do that awful-looking jerk. Just swing nice ‘n’ easy. Slowly, slowly, slowly! This is the way to hitting the ball far, unlike the muscleman approach. That overswinging leads to certain disaster, while slowing down and relaxing will save you countless strokes.

Slamming Sam Snead, 84, is a golf immortal who won 95 Senior and PGA events, including three Masters titles and three PGA Championships.

BRIAN DRAPER/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

TIP OF THE MONTH



MIKE KLEIN/GETTY IMAGES

ARIZONA

THE BOULDERS

Desert golf means coyotes dancing across pool-table green fairways, boulders the size of Jurassic Park dinosaurs, and a warning to stay away from the looming saguaro and prickly pear cactus.

But even if it is a brutish test of keeping the ball straight, “Golf on the Rocks” at the 36-hole Boulders Resort in Carefree, Ariz., remains a dramatic, fun-filled foray amid vast native-American burial grounds, assorted wildlife and 2,500 species of desert flowering plants.

Not long ago, stagecoaches were ambushed in these Sonoran Desert foothills, and golfers will suffer the same fate if they forget that this desert layout is “target” golf, which demands floating balls to safe areas between the many bunkers, washes and stone-filled arroyos.

That finesse is especially vital on the Jay Morrish-designed, 6,926-yard South Course, a roller coaster of dramatically

changing elevations that forces golfers to hit between huge stone outcroppings to reach shimmering green slivers. Golfers can bomb away, but one mistake and balls have a way of disappearing in the thick ryegrass, or under a snake.

Life is far tamer sipping margaritas by the pools, lolling at the spa or while enjoying numerous amenities at this 1,300-acre desert hideaway. The Boulders has won numerous awards, including 5 Diamond honors and a listing in *Traveler* magazine’s Top 20 United States resorts. Also come prepared to feast on the Southwestern-flavored food. It’s hot and memorable.

But the greatest prize at this renowned resort—aside from scoring a few pars—comes from just savoring the desert sunsets. They are simply sensational.

(A short drive from Phoenix or Scottsdale, the Boulders offers several golf packages. For further information, call 800/553-1717 or 602/488-9009.)

—Ed Kiersh



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GOLFING

TRENDS

Having come to know many North Carolina cops on a first-name basis, the tour's self-described "heavy-footed Mario Andretti" makes no excuses for his mounting collection of speeding tickets.

"I love going fast in my awesome truck, and while I don't play golf on the edge, taking aggressive risks is my game," says emerging PGA star Tommy Tolles. "I might've lost a few tournaments this year because I went for broke. But doing things conservatively is boring. I have to take risks. I want to win now."

In only his second year on the tour, the 30-year-old Tolles flirted with a breakthrough win in several PGA events this past season. Though admittedly falling victim to the "shakes" in final rounds, he didn't exactly crash, recording a remarkable run of four top-five finishes over five weeks—including a second at the Players Championship—and pulling in more than \$600,000 by midseason. Yet after four less-than-mediocre years on the Nike Tour (averaging about \$25,000 in earnings), this Skoal-chewing, Flat Rock, N.C., golfer is "in a hurry" to distinguish himself from the other tour young guns making

J.D. CUBAN/ALLSPORT



King Cobra II

Smart Advances in Technological Innovation

Irons



Golf is a visual game. You must carefully select, properly align yourself to and visualize your target, while keeping your eye on the ball and your head down and steady as you swing. It should come as no surprise, then, that the buzz phrase that presently has the golf-club manufacturing industry hopping is "visual technology." Not only does a company's research and development department set out to design a better golf club, but the consumer has to see this technology clearly manifested in the materials and design scheme of the club itself. Enter Cobra Golf's new King Cobra II irons, with their "Integrated Quad System"—"IQ"

for short.

Playing with a set of these beauties definitely represents a sign of intelligence. Let's look at why. Just what four technological innovations do these clubs "integrate" for all to see?

For starters, the club offers what the company calls increased "Heel Weighting," which manifests itself via an asymmetrical hosel, with a discernibly visible "V"-shaped flange that protrudes slightly, though tastefully, behind the hosel of the clubhead itself. The whole game of golf is about returning the clubface into the ball at a square position, a task the first quadrant of Cobra's Integrated Quad System sets out to accomplish. Simply put, the extra weight on the rear side of the hosel assists in the natural rotation of the clubface through impact. Remember, the "King" in King Cobra stands for oversized clubheads, and this product is no exception. Larger clubheads have more difficulty rotating through impact, but the added hosel weight of the King Cobra II does indeed help the larger clubhead square up nicely into the ball.

The second feature is what the company calls its "dual purpose

Tommy Tolles

Tommy Talks
By Ed Kiersh

headlines.

"What I have to do now is learn to control my emotions, cope with the Sunday jitters, and stop getting down on myself after every missed putt," says Tolles, who attributes his 1996 turnaround to becoming mentally

stronger.

"I'm just not the same Tommy Tolles. I still play aggressively, but now I play aggressively smart. I don't try to pull off miracles in every situation. I work in worst-case scenarios to my shot-making, and that's just due to my new maturity. I've grown up a lot facing the pressure of tournaments like the Players Championship, the U.S. Open and the Freeport-McDermott Classic [where he finished third]."

A ne'er-do-well at the University of Georgia, finally deciding to reach for golf glories after "screwing up" in computer programming and his other classes, Tolles is not just working on the mental side of his game. For him to become a consistent winner, he knows he must be more like his boyhood idol, Seve Ballesteros, whom Tolles enviably describes as "having the putting touch of a surgeon."

"I just don't have Seve's finesse and the imaginative shot-making he shows on the course," admits Tolles, who also labels himself an "average" driver and a

"mediocre" putter. "I don't know why I'm doing so well this year.

Maybe it's because my good shots are much better than they used to be, and now I have fewer terrible shots. I'm working the ball more, not aiming for the middle of fairways, and I'm also learning to shape my shots like Nick Faldo—that's definitely helped my driving."

His other driving still remains a problem. Often ticketed by the police, Tolles confesses to racing through the South to get to Florida for snook fishing in the inland rivers near the Gulf of Mexico.

The wily snook, bent on hiding in the mangroves, often elude him. Yet thrilling to this hunt, Tolles plies these waters for hours, determined to come away with one of these "spectacular-tasting fish."

"I'm just stubborn, very hungry," concedes Tolles. "I'm not going to give up going after snook, or in making it to the top of the tour. My trophy case is empty now, but I'm convinced I have the stuff to be a long-term winner."



sole." The clubhead undersurface area is sculptured in a way designed to reduce toe drag, which keeps the clubface moving squarely through impact. Indeed, in addition to creating a sole shape that accommodates a wide range of golf's varying lie angle needs, this second feature also assists in positioning the "sweet spot" directly behind the ball at impact.

Then there's King Cobra II's uniquely "Shaped Shaft," which noticeably widens as the shaft enters the clubhead. The "oversized IQ stabilizing tip" is a visibly reinforced 8.5-inch section of shaft that, Cobra says, "strengthens the shaft through impact with less bending and twisting."

Lastly, golfers will notice the irons' "Progressive Cavity Weighting" in the form of the varying-sized cavity section on the back of the golf club, where weight is strategically positioned as needed to optimize the shot trajectory of every iron in the set.

Actually, another interesting aspect of these clubs deserves mention. For the past five years or more, manufacturers have persistently pointed out that their oversize irons and woods offer more forgiveness on off-center hits. Cobra actually states that rather than

helping you miss the ball better, these clubs encourage and direct a golfer's attention to hitting the ball more consistently on the club's "sweet spot." Now, there's an old idea whose time has come anew! While each innovation has its own part to play, the value of these new irons is that the whole represents more than the sum of its parts. Indeed, golfers want a club that not only feels good, but one that is easy to align and hit, promises consistency, and looks great as well. Indeed, the King Cobra II irons with the "IQ System" deliver on these four performance fronts, just as they so neatly package their four elements of "visual technology." Now, who said golf was a game for dummies?

—Andy Brumer

With its Integrated Quad (IQ) System, a set of these beauties in your possession would definitely represent a sign of intelligence.

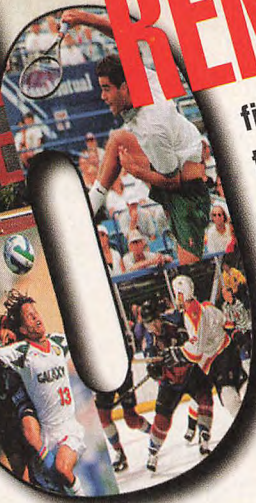
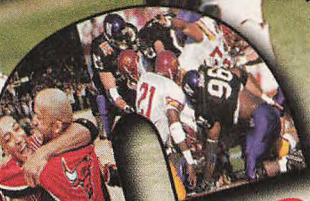




1996. The year of SPORT's 50th anniversary has had its share of golden moments. Just ask the folks down in Texas, who celebrated the Rangers'

REMEMBERED

first-ever division crown on the heels of their beloved Cowboys' third Super Bowl win in four years. Deion Sanders (above) went on the offensive (months before teammate Michael Irvin's drug offense) with a 47-yard reception that helped set the tone for the Boys' 27-17 title-game triumph over the Steelers.





AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS



1996 REMEMBERED

Michael Jordan and the Bulls made history in '96, eighty-sixing the Sonics in the finals to cap a dream season in which they registered an NBA-record 72 regular-season wins....Will the dawn of mass free agency spell darkness for the NBA? The players' new collective-bargaining agreement prompted Shaquille O'Neal (top right, with Lakers VP of basketball operations Jerry West), Charles Barkley, Larry Johnson and a host of big-name players to swap jerseys over the summer....The Colorado Avalanche treated the hungry city of Denver to its first-ever team-sports title by sweeping the Florida Panthers for the Stanley Cup.

NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/REDA PHOTOS





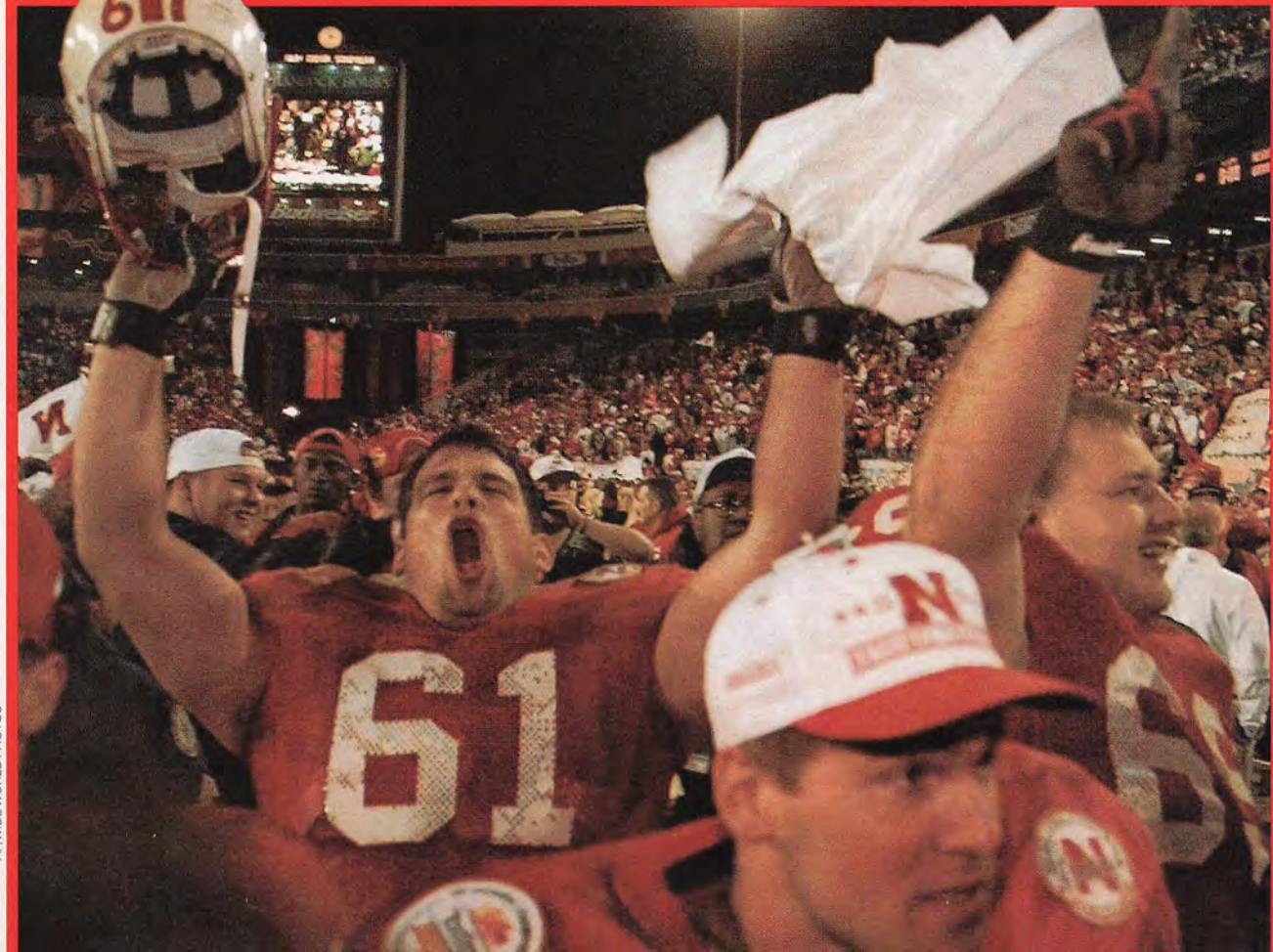
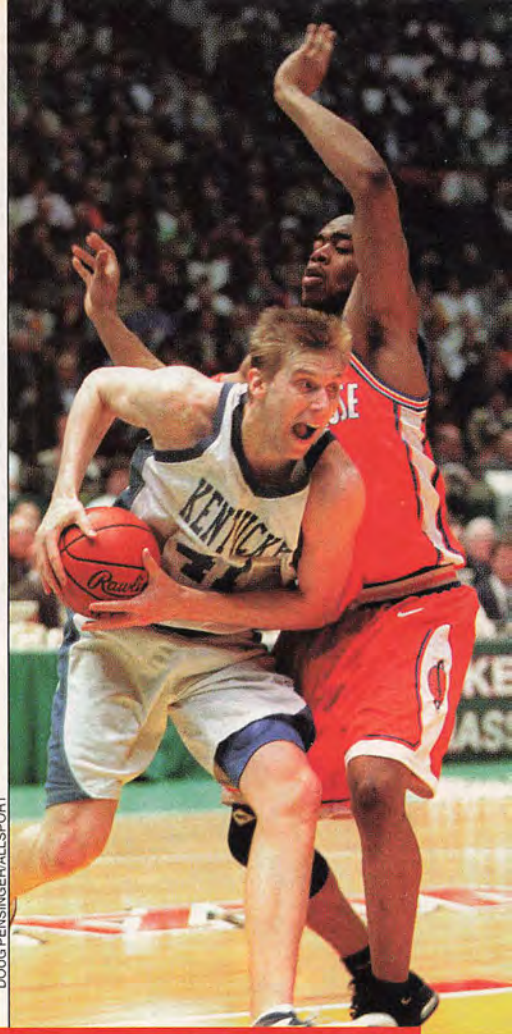
PAUL JASIEŃSKI

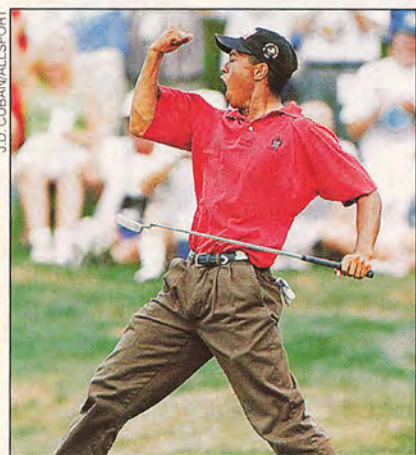
Perennial power Nebraska (below) piled up 62 points in the Fiesta Bowl to flatten Florida, leaving voters little choice but to award the Cornhuskers a second straight national crown.... Not to be overshadowed, underdog Northwestern, despite a loss to USC in the Rose Bowl (above), won a school-record 10 games and had an entire nation on its side.... No Cinderella, Kentucky slipped by Syracuse for college hoops supremacy.



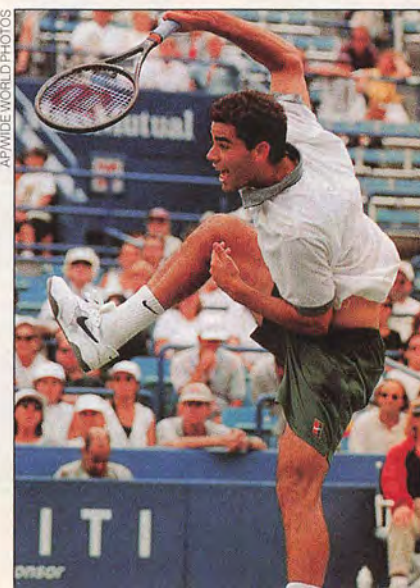
REMEMBERED

DOUG PENSINGER/ALL SPORT





1996 REMEMBERED



Clockwise from top: Michael Johnson exults after shattering his own 200-meter world record at the Atlanta Olympics....A gimpy Kerri Strug celebrates the women gymnasts' team gold medal after landing what was thought to be the clinching vault on virtually one leg....Pete Sampras overcame exhaustion and Michael Chang to claim his fourth U.S. Open title....U.S. soccer is no longer an oxymoron thanks to the start-up MLS, headed by a galaxy of stars like Cobi Jones....Tiger Woods burst onto the pro golf scene after winning an unprecedented third straight U.S. Amateur title.

J.D. CUBAN/ALLSPORT

STEPHEN DUNN/ALLSPORT

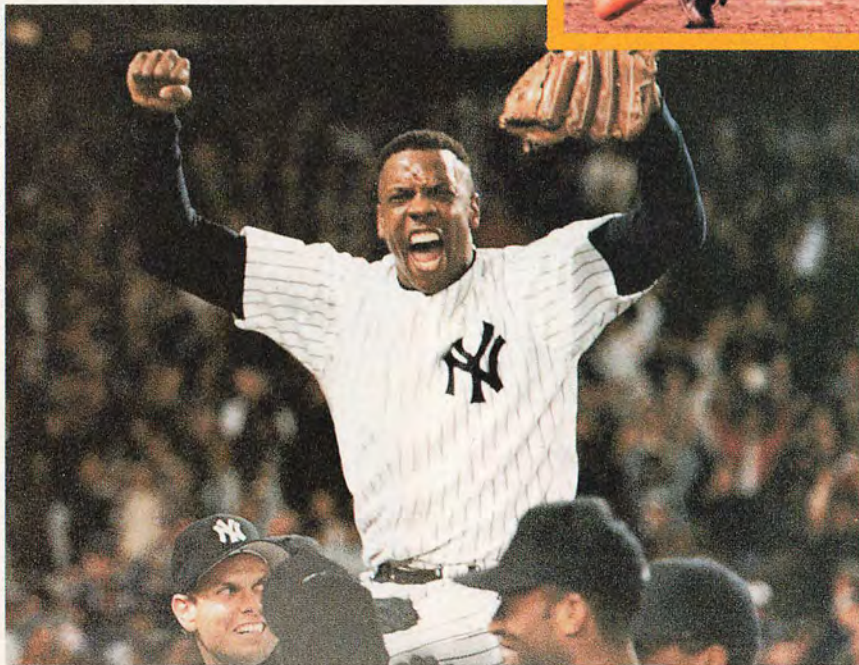
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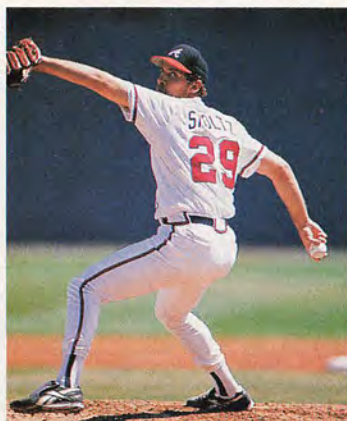
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AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS



TOM DIPACE



BETTMANN PHOTOS



REMEMBERED

In the year of the homer, two improbable no-hitters were thrown—by the Yankees' Dwight Gooden (left), who returned from a prolonged drug-related suspension, and by the Dodgers' Hideo Nomo (top left), who baffled Rockies hitters in the hitting-friendly thin air of Coors Field....By bashing his 500th round-tripper, the Orioles' Eddie Murray (above right) became just the third player ever (Willie Mays, Hank Aaron) to collect 500 homers and 3,000 hits....With a helping hand from 12-year-old Jeffrey Maier (bottom left), who gloved a ball in play that was incorrectly ruled a homer, the Yankees vaulted past the Orioles and into the World Series, where they beat John Smoltz and the favored Braves.

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NOTEWORTHY NUMBERS AND STAT ODDITIES By Dan Gordon



Excluding Carolina and Jacksonville, best NFL winning percentage in the month of December (regular season) in the '90s: .760 (San Francisco)

Best in the AFC: .640 (Buffalo, Kansas City)

Worst in the NFC: .240 (L.A./St. Louis Rams)

Worst in the AFC: .200 (N.Y. Jets)

Raiders' winning percentage from 1966 to 1975: .764

From 1976 to 1985: .691

From 1986 to 1995: .522

Number of times a Miami Dolphins running back has gained 1,000 yards in a season in Dan Marino's 13-year NFL career: 0

Number of 1,000-yard rushers to play alongside Warren Moon: 4

John Elway: 4

Jim Kelly: 7

Number of seasons in which the Charlotte Hornets have grabbed more rebounds than their opponents in the franchise's eight-year history: 0

Number of times a school has repeated as college football champions: 9

Number of schools that have won three straight: 0

Length of the field goal missed by Nebraska kicker Byron Bennett at the end of an 18-16 loss to Florida State in the 1994 Orange Bowl—the only thing preventing the Cornhuskers from having taken three straight national titles into this season: 45

Wins by Frank Leahy in his first 10 years as Notre Dame head football coach: 78

By Ara Parseghian in his first 10 years guiding the Fighting Irish: 85

By current field boss Lou Holtz in his first decade: 92

Of the 21 Pac-10 and Big Ten schools currently eligible to play in the Rose Bowl, number that have yet to play in the venerable New Year's Day contest: 1 (Arizona)

Where Peyton Manning's father, Archie—then a quarterback for the University of Mississippi and later with the New Orleans Saints—finished in the 1970 Heisman voting: 3



Dennis Rodman's rebound average in three years at Southeast Oklahoma State: 15.7

Rodman's college scoring average: 25.7

Consecutive seasons in which Florida State has ranked among the top four teams in the final AP poll: 9

Number of former Heisman Trophy-winning quarterbacks who started on opening day of the 1996 NFL season: 1 (Baltimore's Vinny Testaverde)

Of the 30 opening-day starters, number who once tallied the most points among QBs in Heisman balloting: 4 (John Elway in 1982, Steve Young in 1983, Testaverde in 1986, Rodney Peete in 1988)



Of 15 bowl games in which a Heisman Trophy winner was featured since the 1980 season, number of times the Heisman-winner's team was victorious: 4 ★

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